

November
1994

INTERREGNUM

#8



fantasy roleplaying and more

INTERREGNUM

#8

*An Amateur Press Association
covering fantasy roleplaying games
and anything that interests those who play them.*

Peter Maranci, ed.

Topic: "Haiku"

November 1994

Interregnum is an Amateur Publishing Association, comprised of zines written by individual contributors and mailed to the editor. It is collated and published approximately twelve times per year. New contributors and subscribers are always welcome.

A subscription normally costs \$2.00 per issue plus the actual cost of the selected method of mailing (see FAQ for more details). Subscribers may open an account from which these costs are deducted by mailing a check or money order in US funds, payable to Peter Maranci, at the following address:

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Since Interregnum is an amateur production, it is necessary for contributors to help cover the costs of production: \$2 per single-sided master page mailed in. Alternatively, contributors may mail 400 good double-sided copies of their zine to the editor. The only additional cost to contributors is the price of the postage to mail their issue to them.

All zines sent in for publication in Interregnum should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted by the use of the following phrase:

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Sample issues of Interregnum are available at \$3 each for US and foreign/overseas addresses.

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PUBLICATION SCHEDULE:

⇒ The deadline for inclusion in Interregnum #9 is December 2nd. Zines for Interregnum #10 must arrive by January 5th.

⇒ The topic for Interregnum #9 is *Resurrection*—of characters, campaigns, anything you like.

—>Pete

 circulation continues to increase slowly but steadily; quite a few correspondents have written to tell me that they plan to contribute to future issues. It's safe to say that Interregnum is fairly well established. I even have hopes that someday I won't have to wait in a panic until the last minute, fearing that the issue will be small. ☺

Cards and Letters

I've received a number of letters from readers of Interregnum over the last several months. Why haven't I published them? Actually, the reason is kind of stupid: I'm embarrassed. Almost every letter has been complimentary, **very** complimentary. And somehow I find it very difficult to include unabashed praise for Interregnum **in Interregnum*. It seems boastful. ☺ Nonetheless, I'll look into publishing some of these letters in upcoming issues.

New Department

A new feature is debuting in this issue of IR: The Classifieds. The name pretty gives the picture, I suspect. The column will run in the editorial section, and will feature small personal announcements from gamers. The section will be free, and no commercial ads will be accepted; no game companies may advertise here. However, if you're looking to buy or sell rare or unusual game items, are looking for players or a game, or can think of some other announcement of interest you'd like to publish in IR, drop me a line. Obviously there are limitations of space, but I doubt that will be a problem for a while. ☺

Two items start off the Classifieds:

Chris W., an Interregnum reader, would much appreciate it if any contributor could email him ASCII text for their zines. He's disabled and has difficulty reading the paper version of IR. He'd also be interested in any other ASCII RPG material that anyone would care to send. His email address is chrisw@ace.com. This is an Argus address, so please allow some time for email to reach him -- it's a slow system.

A few months ago I was contacted a couple of times by a gamer in the local area; we discussed his plans to write a zine for IR. He planned modules, scenarios and maps; they sounded like just the sort of thing I like to run. Unfortunately the piece of paper with his name and phone number disappeared in a bizarre accident...well, the truth is I don't know *what* happened to it. In any case, if you're out there (Dennis?), I'm sorry -- please give me a call! I'll immediately enter your data into the computer, I promise. I'll even back it all up right away. ☺

Project Report

It's become imperative that we finish work on the special promotional issues of Interregnum for convention distribution soon. The special copy deal is likely to lapse in the near future; the special issues must be made up and printed before that happens, or else it simply won't be financially possible to do them.

Therefore, I'm setting a deadline: the end of the year. It shouldn't be too great a burden, for the most part: contributors should select some of the best of their work for inclusion. Use the original format, or redo the layout at your option. You can retain comments, or eliminate them if you wish. Retain the copyright, of course!

If you'd like to write new material, that's fine too. I'd like to feature scenarios and other "solid" fare, though opinion pieces and reviews are fine, too.

RuneQuest authors may want to include some RQ-specific material for the RQ-Con 2 issue. That issue will be substantially the same as the regular Con Sampler, but with a greater volume of RQ articles and such.

There will be no charge to appear in the Sampler. A copy of the Sampler will be sent to all contributors and subscribers.

—>Pete

LOG THAT

#8

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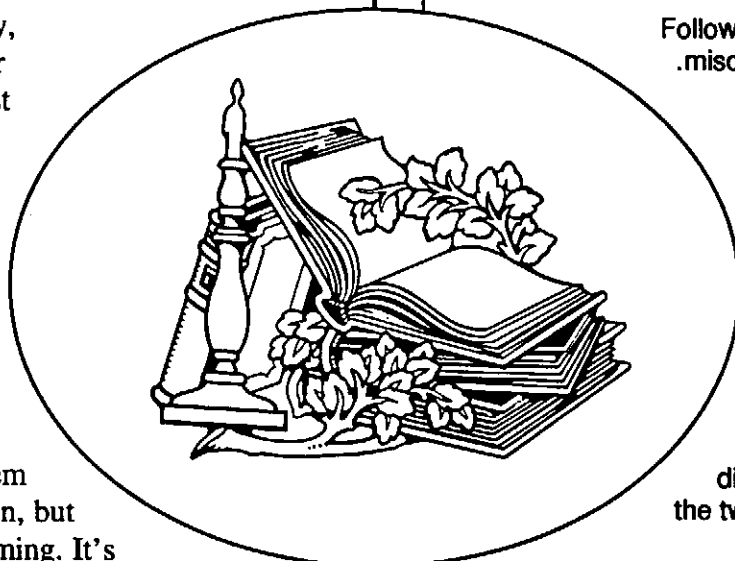
Perhaps it's the change of seasons. Perhaps it's because I've been re-reading the works of J.R.R. Tolkien this month. Perhaps it's the cessation of Daylight Savings Time. Hell, maybe it's because I'm thirty. Who knows? But something strange has been happening to me lately, something that I never expected in my wildest dreams as a kid.

Poetry. I find myself putting words into patterns without even thinking about it. Limericks, blank verse, rhyming couplets...most of them don't get written down, but they seem to keep coming. It's odd, since I'm one of the more prosaic people you'd ever meet. Certainly I never thought I might become a poet! ☺

I'll inflict (if that is the correct word) some haiku in a page or two. But first...

THE GAMING NEWS

My thanks once again to Steve Jackson for permission to reprint the following Net-posted press release in this issue. Though I don't suppose it was necessary to ask his permission this time—after all, it is a *press* release, and *Interregnum* is press! ☺



rec.games.frp.announce (moderated) #1278

From: Scott D Haring <sdharing@io.com>

[1] [INDUSTRY] White Wolf, SJ Games Reach Settlement

Followup-To: rec.games.frp-
.misc

Date: Wed Oct 26
00:01:15 EDT 1994

PRESS RELEASE

Steve Jackson Games and White Wolf announced today that they have reached a full compromise on all disputed issues between the two companies.

GURPS MAGE: THE ASCENSION will be released in October, with full White Wolf approval, but will be the last GURPS/STORY-TELLER release. The SJ Games license to sell the four existing books in the GURPS/STORY-

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TELLER series will remain valid until the end of 1997.

GURPS VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE will be released in French and German, utilizing already-finished translations, but there will be no other foreign editions of the GURPS STORYTELLER books.

White Wolf has recognized SJ Games' concern over the similarity between SJ Games' trademarked logo and a graphic in White Wolf's WRAITH series. White Wolf will be removing the graphic from future printings of WRAITH products. No existing WRAITH books will be removed from sale.

Company presidents Steve Wieck and Steve Jackson praised Phil Brucato and Derek Percy, of their respective editorial staffs, for helping to keep lines of communication open and make the settlement possible.

For further information, contact White Wolf at 404-292-1819 or Steve Jackson Games at 512-447-7866.



Haiku for You

The haiku bug bit me badly this month. I found myself making haiku about almost everything I saw, and of course roleplaying games were not excluded. Here are a few roleplaying haiku. Each is about a particular game system; can you guess which is which? The answers are revealed on page 7.

1. I jump from behind
My dagger cleaves the orc's back.
Five XPs for me!
2. MOM WAS BLYZTH THE GHOUL
DAD, A DEEP ONE NAMED XAXLAX.
WHY'D THEY NAME ME "BOB"?
3. PRAISE THE COMPUTER,
ALTHOUGH—YES, VULTURE LEADER
I'LL COME QUIETLY
4. Past Aldebaran
Grubby little shopkeepers
Want to make a deal?
5. Wearing black, I lurk.
Child of the Night, I hunger.
Stop calling me "geek"!
6. TAP, TAP, TAP, TAP, TAP.
LATE AT NIGHT, WHEN I'M ALONE
I FONDLÉ MY CARDS...
7. Giant metal men
In a high-tech future world?
Makes no sense at all.
8. HACKER, RUNNER, THIEF
BLEAK URBAN-TECH-ANGST FUTURE,
STRANGELY DUNGEONLIKE



And now, a few more haiku. These aren't roleplaying-related, but do have some connection to science fiction or fantasy. The last is unique in that it has a title; I don't know if that's acceptable to the traditional definition of haiku, but what the heck. ☺

No mere turtle, he.
Flame blasts from arm and leg holes.
Friend to all children...

When I close my eyes
I hear a dragon roaring
Instead of a flush

How to cook Hobbit?
Gandalf's stone-soup recipe
Ends all argument.

Godzilla s Milkman?

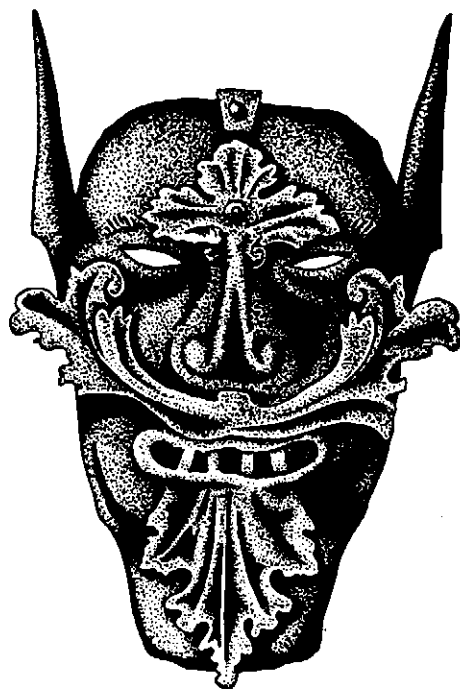
World s strongest monster.
Why does such a champion
Have such a lame son?

There will be more haiku in future issues, I'm sure. Though I probably won't inflict it on contributors as a topic again. ☺

WORDER OF WORDERS

It would seem that a valuable lesson has been learned from my experience with the recruiting effort for the Wonder campaign: A flyer that's too polished will scare everyone off. The Wonder flyers produced not one single player, while announcements on a few Internet newsgroups and on a Boston bibliophiles email list produced more than enough. All that remains is to get all the characters ready, set a time, and begin. I'm looking forward to it, and hope that the writeups will prove interesting. I'm not altogether sure that it will be possible

to write up each week's adventures as scenarios, but it should be interesting to try.



COMMENTS #7

George Phillies: Apparently TSR has actually been writing to FTP sites on the Internet and threatening them with legal action if they do not delete any TSR-related files. Copies of their letters have been posted in public newsgroups, and I must say that they're arrogant, rude, and dictatorial. Interestingly enough the TSR Internet representative suddenly stopped posting several weeks ago. It may be a coincidence, but I'd posted a rather strident analysis of the contradictions of his various statements. When he responded threateningly to my suggestion that authors were afraid that TSR might appropriate their work—was I suggesting that TSR carried out illegal acts?—I was pleased to remind him about the Tolkien copyright infringement, and remarked that the SPI incident, if not illegal, was nonetheless extremely evil.

He didn't respond. But a number of people emailed me, asking for the details about the TSR-SPI incident. ☺

I'm enjoying No Tears for a Princess very much indeed, which is perhaps a bad thing—since you say it's a novel fragment, I'd hate to get too interested only to end up frustrated at a sudden break. Is this a project you've abandoned completely, or might you finish it off eventually (if inspiration strikes)? It's really excellent work, certainly as good as any fantasy that's published these days—and more...well...*textured* than many new fantasy novels. Perhaps it's just me, but most new fantasy seems somewhat crude and almost embarrassingly simplistic.

You know, George, matching the math/physics characters of your zine numbering for the Table of Contents is becoming quite a challenge. I was forced to desperate measures for #7...can you guess what they were? ☺

Doug Jorenby: I've often thought that the best way to run a horror campaign would be to tell the players that it was something else to start with. The problem, however, is that there are too many players these days who simply wouldn't accept the change in tone. In

fact, I've run into many players who simply go on strike if a game doesn't follow their very strict expectations. For example, I've had players who've deliberately walked into near-hopeless situations which they *knew* were suicidally dangerous, only to get angry and fight when faced with overwhelming odds! This left me with the choice of having them all killed outright (since the odds were twenty to one against them) or harming the game by crocking a win for them. Either way, the game—and ultimately the players—were bound to lose. That's simply bad roleplaying, in my book.

Hmm. If something like that were to happen now, I think I'd kill them all and let them continue the game as ghosts. It would be an interesting change of state. Even more interesting would be to have them return as various kinds of undead: ghouls, zombies, ghosts, vampires, etc. A party like that could be extremely amusing, if it were handled with a light touch. For one thing, it would make buying new equipment a major challenge. Merchants would keep running away! ☺



The idea that the players must always be able to triumph over any odds harkens back to the wargaming roots of roleplaying. I can't imagine a novel, for example, in which the protagonist(s) never suffer reverses; such a book would be extremely dull, and probably unpublishable. In The Lord of the Rings Merry and Pippin were seized and carried away by orcs; yet in a similar situation I know of many players who'd refuse to accept such a situation, whining and breaking

out of character at the "injustice". A game where the characters do nothing but suffer wouldn't be much fun (and Moorcock's Elric series sometimes has this quality, as does the Hellblazer comic book), but misfortune often offers outstanding dramatic opportunities to roleplayers.

My own games these days are all serial-types, with extended plotlines that run for years. I enjoy such games, but sometimes feel that I should leaven the plot mix with something a little quicker.

Curtis Taylor: Where do you get your line art, Curtis? It looks great, but somehow familiar.

I've written to Wizard's Attic (about eight or nine months ago) but haven't heard anything for ages. Do you know if they've folded?

Thanks for the POG counters, Curtis! I haven't started any POG games yet, however. For one thing, I don't know anyone around here who plays them. Also, I'd probably lose. Then I'd start sulking, and be all bitter and stuff. ☺

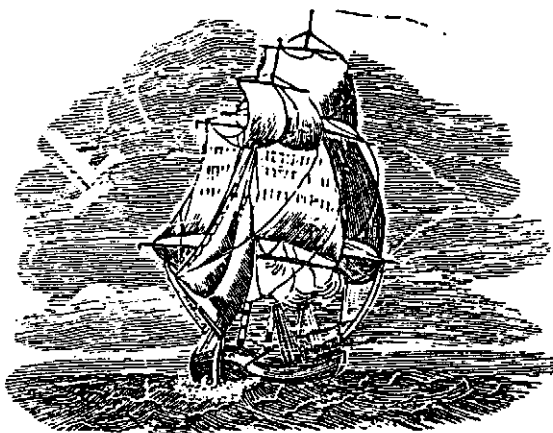
Ah, Lost Worlds. I'd forgotten about that. I really should pick up a copy, if any are still available. I don't think the LW fad ever approached the mammoth popularity of Magic: The Gathering, though.

It's funny: I'm terrible at wargames, but the few times I played Lost Worlds I was unbeatable. Guess I really *should* buy a copy! But since everyone I could play against reads IR, I guess I've just warned them all off...☺

A very nice RuneQuest cult listing.

Gil Pili: Hee hee! TSR is no longer the "biggest game shop on the corner"; Wizards of the Coast is. One of the very few good side-effects of Magic: The Gathering. ☺

Your article on Horror was excellent. I hadn't thought of looking at the subject so analytically. It makes me feel a bit guilty...I should have written more. Oh well. At least my zine will probably have the most by far about this month's topic than anyone else. ☺



In any case, the best explanation I can come up with for TSR's corporate behavior is this: they're bastards. It's simplistic, I know. But it does seem to cover all points, so Occam's Razor would indicate that it's the best explanation. ☺

It's interesting that you feel that gaming is better with good friends, since I've been specifically looking for new faces for the Wonder campaign; I'm not ruling out old friends as players by any means, but much of the current gaming group has gone stale for me (going stale or burning out will undoubtedly be a topic in some future issue of IR).

Of course, it's necessary that players not be hostile to each other. But need they be "good friends"? I'm not sure. On the other hand, good roleplayers who get along in my games are the kind of people who make good friends in any case. ☺

Scott Ferrier: It would seem that Doom is the standard by which all other computer games

are measured. I find that interesting; was their a previous standard which was displaced by Doom, or did it fill a vacuum?

The Corel Art Show 4 CD-ROM sounds like a complete ripoff. Thanks for warning me about it. I probably wouldn't have bothered anyway, though; most CD-ROMs of clipart have little of the kind of art I need for IR. It's a good thing my Dover collection is large enough to last for many years.

I didn't understand the spoilers at all. But since I won't be playing Doom II, I guess that's nothing to worry about.

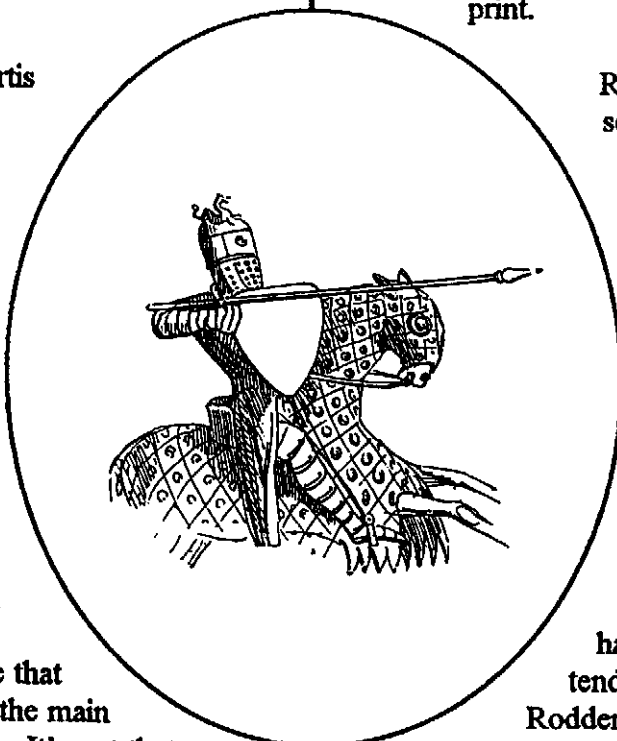
Regarding the SJGames/White Wolf announcements, I find it interesting that Steve Wieck suggested that people email him privately for information, but did not reply to my request for permission to reprint his response. He's certainly far less accessible than Steve Jackson.

Re your comment to Curtis Taylor: I agree that the Net discussions of RuneQuest these days have had a dampening effect on my interest in Glorantha. I wonder if I'll ever run Glorantha again; it used to be a good background to go back to every few years, but now there's so much nitpicking material that it seems a waste of time. I couldn't possibly absorb all that material, and so any game I would run would be that much more detached from the main stream of Gloranthan reality. It's not that I feel that a game world has to be "regulation"; not at all. But there've been so many major retroactive changes and such a huge increase in the volume of (really boring) material that I

can't possible learn it all and keep it straight. Nor am I interested in doing so. If I ever do a RQ Glorantha campaign again, it will be on the strict understanding that any information or material from the Net and Greg Stafford's King of Sartar will have to be approved by me.

Virgil Greene: An excellent analysis of vampires, Virgil, thorough and thoughtful. But I notice that the Dracula of the Saberhagen series (my personal favorite vampire series) doesn't fit into your list: Vampirism as a rare but natural human state.

I've long felt that Ann Rice's vampire books were vastly inferior to Fred Saberhagen's Dracula; twisted sex and sadomasochism made the Rice books intensely annoying to me, while the earlier Saberhagen books were intelligent, exciting, witty, and much more enjoyable. I only hope that the current Vampire craze inspires Saberhagen's publishers to bring the Dracula books back into print.



Regarding *Deep Space 9*, it seems strange to say but I must admit: I no longer find the show interesting. It just doesn't feel like science fiction any more; instead, it features moralistic preaching, New Age nostrums, and soap opera relationships. The writing is flaccid and predictable, the dialog is stilted and corny, and the special effects are not particularly well handled or interesting. The tendency to preach which Gene Roddenberry sometimes evinced now dominates the show. If I want to be preached at, I'll go to church.

On the other hand (and also to my surprise) Babylon 5 has been getting better and better, to

the point that I consider it the premier science fiction show on television today. The more I watch it, the more that I'm convinced that the creator was not only a roleplayer, but probably a deep-roleplaying gamemaster; the plot structure and the way elements unfold are very reminiscent of some deep-roleplaying games I've seen. Though the show isn't perfect the plots are interesting and complex, the dialog is improving, and the special effects (including alien make-up) are first-rate.

An Interregnum reader has put together a Babylon 5 APA, The Babylon Project. I haven't had a chance to get a copy yet, but I'm certainly planning to. I'll see if he's interested in a plug in IR, and if he is I'll put subscription info in the next issue.

NONE DARE CALL IT "FILLER" ☺

Rich Staats to the rescue again! Directly following this page.

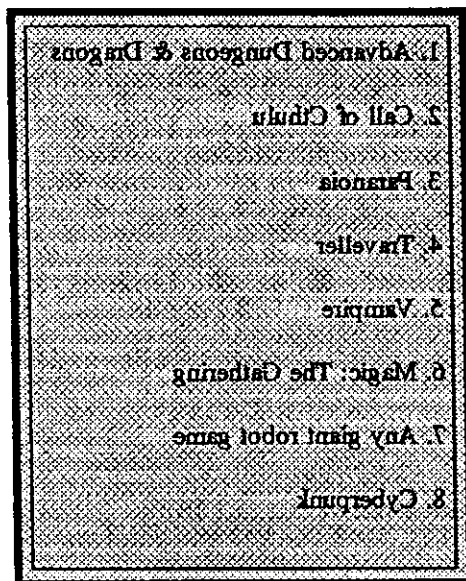
NEXT ISSUE

There was a lot I'd planned to write for this issue, but I simply lacked the time. Perhaps I'll make up for it next time—in any case, I'll give it a good try.



Haiku Answers

To decipher the answers, hold this page up to a mirror (or read backwards—it's not that difficult, just like the haiku themselves ☺). The answers are in the same order as the haiku.



—>Pete

COLOPHON

The Log That Flies #8 was gestated in a P. Maranci 30.6 brain. Much of the text was then written with PC-Write 2.5, an ancient but serviceable villain word processor.

The text was formatted for desktop publication using Publish-It 4.0 for Windows, a cranky but cheap DTP program.

The DTPed document was printed at a ruinous cost at a laser printing service, on a 300 dpi laser printer.

Most of the art in TLTF is taken from books of copyright-free clipart published by the Dover Publishing Co. of Mineola, NY. Reviews of various Dover books may be printed in future issues.

The art was copied on a Kodak 2110 high-speed duplicator.

Camera is friend to all children. But don't ask him to baby-sit, he has a problem with snacks ☺ —>Pete

RuneQuest Con Module

© Rich Staats 1994

Commonly Known Background Information

The town of Kernan lies in the center of a fertile area of farmland. Kernan was founded in 3253 Y.O.L. (Year of the OverLord). It is currently 5625 Y.O.L.... Currently, the town boasts a population of approximately 500 souls. Technically the town is administered by Lord Quival who is the hereditary ruler of the region, and the Lord answers only to the Overlord in Xanduru. In practice, Lord Quival has given large amounts of authority to the local Town Council, and he is content to allow the business of the town to be conducted by the Council while he maintains order in the surrounding areas.

Kernan lies in the middle of a triad of interesting landmarks. Ten leagues to the East lies Veldman's Needles. It is rumored that these mountains arose when the demi-god Veldman summoned them to destroy a ravaging chaos army. Even in the midst of Fire Season, the Needles are cold and foreboding. Trolls and wyverns make their homes in these mountains. Five leagues to the South of Kernan lies Gebnik Glade. This is the home of many elves, halflings, runners and pixies. Legend has it that there is a gate to the lands of Sidhe in the center of this majestic forest. What is known that few who enter the woods without the expressed invitation of the Aldrami who live there ever return, and none of those who return tell pleasant tales. There are said to be fairy rings and magical fires that will melt an intruder like breath on a frost fern. Seven leagues to the North-Northwest lies the festering ruins of Balcon. Balcon was the original settlement in the area. It was founded by Veldman when he still walked amongst the mortals. After Veldman defeated the chaos army by creating the Needles, a Priest of Malia sneaked into Balcon and released a virulent plague called by many the Blood Death. The disease proved to be an unstoppable killer, and the best efforts of the Chalana Arroy healers were swept away. Brother turned against brother, and ultimately Balcon was burned to the ground. The survivors fled to Kernan. To this day, those who enter the ruins take the risk of contracting the Blood Death. One of the few death penalty offenses under the benign rule of Lord Quival is to enter Balcon and return without being declared clean by the healers of Chalana Arroy.

There are many notable personages around town. Following is a brief summary of the most prominent.

Lord Quival Head of the Town Council and hereditary ruler of Kernan. A fair and kind ruler, Lord Quival prefers to let the Council administer the day to day affairs of the Town. Lord Quival was a fast friend of Tarkis. (Human male)

Lady Sernilia Recently given a land-grant by King Rhyu II in the area of Veldman's Needles. She is seen rarely, and even then she is only seen at night frequenting the Seven Stars Inn. Lady Sernilia is of surpassing beauty but extremely pale skin.

Tarkis The missing person. Tarkis was the head of Lord Quival's cabinet. He was strong but willing to listen to and use the ideas of others for the betterment of all. (Human male)

Gerald	The town constable (Human male)
Brythold	The Wheel smith (Human male)
Halor	Herbalist (Human male)
Heremavi	Proprietor of the Seven Stars Inn (Human female)
Fulia	Money changer (Halfling female)
Halwyn	Blacksmith (Dwarvish female)
Ramber	Baker (Human male)
Widbert	Granary owner (Human male)
Rayward	Lankor Mhy Priest (Human male)
Wanda	Loose Wanda's Inn & Grill (Human female)
Gilric	General Store (Human male)
Brunasa	Tanner (Overman female)

<i>Evertol</i>	Livestock and Stables (Human male)
<i>Walwyn</i>	Priestess of Kernan (Human female)
<i>Golga</i>	Priestess of Ty Kora Tek (?)
<i>Sigbrandi</i>	Priestess of Ernalda
<i>Freda</i>	Healer (Elvish female)
<i>Mova</i>	Healer (Human female)
<i>Bert</i>	Healer (Human male)

Current Situation

You were visiting Lord Quival's residence and enjoying a quiet evening sitting in the common room with some friends. Tarkis had gathered the group of you together to reveal something "extraordinary and of grave significance." Tarkis had gone upstairs to retrieve this "something". While recalling old tales with your friends, you suddenly heard a scream from upstairs. You rushed en masse up the stairs and burst into Tarkis' room. There was no sign of Tarkis, but the room had been ramsaced! As you searched around for clues, the town constable, Gerald, no friend of the group, burst in. Gerald sized up the situation, and a grim smile crept across his face. Gerald turned to the waiting guardsmen in the hall and said "I knew that it would finally come to this! Guards seize them!"

Let the games begin!

Myria

You are originally from Titsu in the Eastern Empire. When you were young, your village was attacked by orcs. The orcs killed your family and were about to kill you when a mysterious stranger interposed himself between you and the orcs and drove them back. That stranger was Tarkis! Tarkis got you to Titsu where he got you placed in a foster home. You have stayed in touch with him ever since. You would gladly give your life for Tarkis'. Remember that "Life is a Feather while Duty is a Mountain!" You trust the other party members implicitly. The group has had many shared adventures, and you are confident in the motivations of each of the others. You know that the secret that Tarkis was going to share with the group had something to do with the ruins of Balcon, and you also know that there were several people in Kernan who did not approve of Tarkis' activities with respect to Balcon. Most notably Walwyn and Golga both heaped insults upon Tarkis the last time the two of you had gone into Loose Wanda's for a bit of ale.

You must find Tarkis either dead or alive and repay your debt to him --- even if that costs you your life.

Guy

You have known Tarkis your entire life. Tarkis was a friend of your family growing up. Although he traveled frequently in your youth, "Uncle" Tarkis always seemed to be there when you most needed him. After your father's death, your family was evicted by Julia from their home. You vowed to find some way to repay her "kindness". Although it broke your mother's heart, you joined the Cult of Baris the Black, a thieves group operating in and around Kernan. You learned your lessons well, and soon you had the opportunity to take out your revenge on Julia, but just as you were about to break in, Tarkis came around the corner and said simply "Guy, I have far better uses for your talents than to have you spend the rest of your days missing a hand. Come with me." Indeed Tarkis was better than his word, and he arranged for you to get together with the rest of the party and begin to explore the area around Kernan. The group fought back many a chaos beast and righted some wrongs, but this did not always make the group or Tarkis very popular. In particular, Gerald resented the group's activities. More than once in recent seasons you have heard Gerald say "there's only room enough in this Town for one source of justice, and I'm it! Sooner or later that Tarkis is going to step over the line, and when he does, I'll be there!" Now as you think back, it was kind of unusual how Gerald was there right away after Tarkis disappeared! you trust the rest of the group implicitly. You have all saved each others' lives on various occasions. It looks like you had better work together once again or end up at the end of a rope!

Adelbran

Most elves are flawless creatures, but some are not born that way. The outside world is not aware of this, because the elves leave those with deformities out to die in the woods. The elves call it "Aldrami Fate", but you yourself call it murder. You were cast outside as an infant for your club foot. Tarkis found you in the woods and brought you back to safety. Tarkis raised you as his own until you were old enough to go back to Gebnik Glade and ask for the chance to claim your place in elvish society. Even when Tarkis was gone, the Quival's household treated you as one of its own members. But, this did not earn the undying respect of all of the members of Kernan. Gilric's entire family was killed by an elvish raid when he was a small boy, and now he hates any elf. Golga claimed that you would have been better off dead, and she hates you to this day! Widbert has said on many occasions that Gebnik Glade should be burned to the ground to allow more room for crops and farmsteads. To him you represent the ultimate affront to mankind, one who defends the backward world of the forest. As Tarkis defended you all these years, he also earned the wrath of these townsfolk too. You trust the remainder of your group with your life, and you would gladly go with these people to the nine planes of Hell themselves. There is some type of tension between Leoshi and Myria, but it is none of your affair unless it threatens the party. Looks like you will have to work with them again, or else you might not be working with anyone ever again!

You were born and raised in the Eastern Empire in the vicinity of Titsu. You lived your life in the shadow of a particular heroine, Myria. You have dedicated your entire life to dishonoring this Myria while bringing greater glory to you and your family. Imagine your joy when you were met by Tarkis, Myria's master! Tarkis invited you to join his special operatives. There would be no better way to have your revenge on Myria than bringing her discredit in front of Tarkis! You have bided your time for years, but now with Tarkis' disappearance, the time to strike is here! If you can find Tarkis while showing Myria to be incompetent, you will have accomplished your purpose. In spite of your feelings toward Myria, you would never voluntarily betray the group to any danger. You owe the group your life several times over. Huvis is a little arrogant, but you would still defend him if possible. Kaynin is strange, but then again, he is an Overman! You have been amazed at the nearly psychic bond between Tarkis and Kaynin at times. You would normally feel apprehension about your plans for Myria. But, what is between you and Myria is a matter of honor, and honor must be avenged!

Kaynin

You are an Overman from the Froud Grasslands far to the West of here. You stand about 7'6" tall, have black leathery skin, no nose, red irisless eyes and two opposable thumbs on each hand. Your people were created by a wizard in Basst. Although not originally a natural species, your people have been quick to supplant others in the "natural order." You are stronger and quicker than a human could hope to be. In all respects, you are superior to the lowly race which created you. You were a prince among your own people, but you wished for more. you wished for immortality. So, you went to see the wise woman in your tribe. She told you to seek out one name Tarkis in the human town of Kernan and serve him faithfully. So, you made the trek across the hundreds of leagues that at last brought you to Kernan. Tarkis was waiting for you when you arrived. He challenged you to a wrestling contest! Bah! You had never before been defeated; no puny human could hope to defeat you, but sure enough, Tarkis bested you three times in a row. Tarkis merely retorted "force of arms cannot defeat purity of spirit." You have followed Tarkis for the past five years and come to accept him as your master. You believe all the members of the group to be competent, but you realize there is some tension between Leoshi and Myria. You also mistrust Huvis as he relies solely on his magic! Now, the humans have conspired to sentence you and your friends to death! Well, let them try! You will go down fighting if necessary, but if there is a way to show your own innocence then you will do so just to displease Gerald!

Tarkis is still alive! You know it! But, something is wrong! You have visions of . . . a temple, it is dark, they are tying your hands. You hear the voice of Golga! What is this? Ah! Tarkis must be sending you some type of message. What should you do now? Time is of the essence and any non-violent interaction with the guards will take time, and that is something that Tarkis may have precious little of . . .

Risk

You have a secret which you have told no one. Only Tarkis knows, and he found out by accident. You are not what you appear to be at all. Secretly you are a shape shifted bunny! You were once a fat hare down in an alchemical laboratory in Basst. The famous mage Yisterwald was conducting experiments on you to try to prolong life. That was back in 1948 Y.O.L.! The experiment not only had the effect of dramatically stopping the aging process, it also made you slowly turn into a human! Eventually you were able to escape the care of Yisterwald who was contemplating disposing of you at the time. For many years you fled across the country side running from Yisterwald, your own shadow or anything that reminded you of Yisterwald! Until you ran into Tarkis one day, you used to change into a giant rabbit each Wildday. Tarkis has some method of counteracting the transformation, and if he is gone for good then you are doomed to repeat your shapeshifting ways. Alas! The penalty for being a shape shifter in the Empire is death, and you have a couple of good millennia left in you! You must do anything you reasonably can to find Tarkis before the next Wildday or your life is forfeit! The entire party is filled with good folk, but you mistrust Hurvis a bit as he uses some spellcraft unlike that used by other mages you have seen. Best to keep an eye on him!



The Skeleton Key

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AN INTERNAL ART? A few thoughts on gaming.

I think that I might be more tempted to agree with the statement "Gaming can be art" than the blanket assertion that "Gaming is art." Pete in fact captures this when he writes, "...from personal experience I can testify that the roleplaying experience has the potential to be much more [than hack and slash], though that potential is all-too-rarely realized."

It is natural for anyone deeply involved with an activity (as I admit I am, though due to time constraints, not as much as I'd like) to expound upon the virtues of their favorite pastime. Yet a sense of caution prevents me from readily ascribing roleplaying the status of art.

I'll focus on the last two of Pete's four ideas as roleplaying as art, which in a sense are the same thing; the fact that the experience of roleplaying is primarily an internal event.

"3) Unrecordable - no record could reproduce the impact of the game in the primary stage.

4) roleplaying is not a spectator sport."

Both of these are certainly true, and to the point that I wonder, could one say that roleplaying is a



personal and internal art? Here, unlike movies and television, we do not have the luxury or tyranny of directors and professional actors directing our steps or conversely, producing our ideas in perfect pitch and hue. Much of roleplaying is internal - it takes places in the mind, as few roleplayers have the luxury of being professional actors, musicians, scripters or what-have-you. It is testament to the power of the human mind that we are able to shape and share such varied visions of all the possible worlds of human (and alien?) kind. But what sort of art is almost purely

internal, having no reference to anything external except perhaps some sheets of papers and an odd drawing? If gaming is an art, it is a very curious one, with little if any relevance or impact to any outside the immediate band of participants.

With the assistance of my PBEM players, logs and information banks of events and cultures in play have been maintained. This is made simple by the electronic nature of our communication, and we have accumulated hundreds of pages of text at this point. But curiosity impels me to wonder, what will I find when I go back and re-read these gaming logs, once the game is over. Two years after? Five? Will there be anything to speak to me, anything at all, that was not somehow invisibly wrapped up in the very act of creation and genesis which keeps every game alive? So it is with a curious sense of possible futility that I continue to record the happenings, if for no other reason than the selfish satisfaction of producing, with the aid of my players, however fractious, a game of myriad cultures and technologies, songs, dances and common conversation. The

game's dialogic nature has been pointed out as a weakness and as strength - it can slow the game, even as it imparts a more life-life, or cinematic view to the events, described and reacted to by the participants. If years from now, I read over my logs of the games, and it is more than simple scanning of eyes over text, if there are some grand arching themes or ideas that I felt were expressed by the game as whole, then perhaps I might venture to call it art.

FTF gaming, unrecordable,

exists only in the mind, and as such is subject to the vagaries of memory and bias. Unlike other oral narratives, gaming war stories are notorious for their inability to capture the primacy of the moment, while all one has to do is listen to a good narration of an old folk tale to be convinced of the art of storytelling. But that is not roleplaying, only a small component of it. Storytelling is a gift, and an art, but it can be recorded and honed, studied, with meaning for others besides those involved in the event about which the story is told.

Those last two points of Pete's highlight my main reasons for objecting to putting roleplaying in the category of art. Outside of those who have played in a game, what did they bring away from it that might give a reason to call it art? Art has significance above and beyond its own material components, it should strike something in the viewer, reader, whatever, that stays with him or her, forging new connections. Games are not neat stylized epics, they are messy concatenations of conversation, argument and fantasy; this is not to say that one can't bring something away from a game - only that it is more difficult, more hidden and in the end, a personal process. That is why gaming is governed so by personal preference, the desire for certain types of experiences and archetypes, whether they be a distaste for

stereotyped dark futures, or an embrace of superhero soft reality. Role-playing is one of my favorite hobbies, not only in itself, but from a meta-narrative view, the stories we are telling about these other people who are and are not ourselves, these others that we contain within ourselves, endowing them with description, habit and ways of thought. There is an art *to* role-playing, just as there is in any other entertainment where a certain level of skill in something, in this case, storytelling and human interaction, is involved. Roleplaying can take place on many levels, or just one, and certainly it can be entertaining, enjoyable, and memorable, but I would not call it art.



COMMENTS ON INTERREGNUM #7

LOG #7:

"AD&D is "light" fantasy? That's a bit hard to believe, the game is almost always focused on killing and death." I can understand your incredulity, but would be so vain as to quote myself from the last issue "Light: things are fantastic, heroic, larger than life...clear moral boundaries exist."

While I would not typify all AD&D games in this manner (mine weren't like this), I would reiterate that many if not most, meet the criteria I postulated above. Is there killing and death? Certainly - but it is almost always of the evil or enemy, and in any case, very few considerations of the impact of the slaughter are considered, except as a handle for the next plot device. I once read an interesting definition of cinema heroes - in essence, the ones that were most successful at killing. A rather brutal definition, but it certainly fits many movies, and many games as well, where the villain is defeated personally by the hero - and however devious or powerful the villain, it falls.

I'm glad you enjoyed Avalon - there will be more write-ups if we return to the game before I graduate. ;-)

REFUGEE

Only one quibble: I liked the story, but the idioms in common English, 'creep', 'gonna', clash with older choices of words like 'ought' and 'ensorcelled.'

SESSION NOTES #20

"Cthulu under a bush." I think you hit upon a key element: horror is best when it is unexpected. Tiny bits of atmosphere can contribute to this, insofar as they don't overwhelm what is about to happen. My favorite memory of

a vaguely horrific situation was in Gil's original Harnquest game, where, for a number of reasons we were imprisoned in a basement, with one of us bleeding to death (I think it was my character - hence the horror ;-). The way the setting was described, and the faint sounds of Dead Can Dance floating in from the nearby room, made it an eerie, memorable event.

As far as indoctrination: as my senior thesis, new internship, and the general stress of planning for the future begins to impinge on my hitherto carefree (HA! ;-) life, I find that it becomes more difficult to keep to a regular schedule. In the last few weeks, I've missed a few sessions.

Still being a college student, I have a certain amount of flexibility, living with or very near all the players. Yet not all of us can play all the time. The solution I find is to have a group of five or six, so that one, and if necessary, two can be absent at once, and be flexible to focus the plot of the evening on the characters that do happen to be there. This worked very well in prior campaigns I ran; our techie's player is a fencer - he'd chronically be late because of held over practices. Hence his character did not become a major player until the fencing season had ended, and he was perfectly happy with it. Imperfect solutions for imperfect situations, I know, but take it for what it is worth.

STRANGE SANDS

Loved your horror piece, and if you check up a few lines, I even cited you as a source for inspiring atmosphere!

Speaking of atmosphere, I highly recommend checking out Kenneth Brannagh's *Frankenstein*. Incredibly intense and quite vivid - not something

to take anyone squeamish to. Not that violent in the scheme of things, but with a grand sweep and feel that you have to see in a big theatre to believe. The supporting cast is incredible, and Brannagh and DeNiro complement each other as doctor and monster. The soliquy in the beginning where the doctor says, "We are steps away from replacing hearts, and if not parts, then why not the whole? Soon we will be designing life...creating it!" My rendering of his speech is crude, but the prescience with which the dilemmas of modern genetics were foreseen is truly chilling.

If you see it, let me know if it reminds at all of "Bladerunner"; the monster's soliloquy was eerily familiar! As Doug Jorenby noted, not only are we [the replicant/monster] better at being good than you, we are better at being bad, than our creators. "If only you could see what I've seen with these eyes..."

8-TRACK MIND

Hey, now there is a thought...having old Chmee suddenly show up to spook Kendra. *grin* Or even worse, Zilbin. ;-) What a thought...shh, a player might be reading this!

ALL: As always, real life intrudes and interrupts my placid existence. Hopefully things will have slowed down so I can write more for next issue. At the moment, I'm researching a senior thesis on boundaries in virtual newsgroups, just nailed a paid internship with PC WEEK as an editorial intern, and continue to juggle the many obligations and plans of a college senior, something that most of the rest of you are thankfully past. Whew! What a semester...

Strange Sands

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Back from the Dead

So what happens when your PC is resurrected? Is he zapped with cosmic light and suddenly shocked back to life? Does she leap off the table and say "Great to be back" perhaps taking a little jog in the process? Most importantly, does he act as if death were nothing more than a minor inconvenience?

If we were to follow the definition of resurrection in AD&D, that might actually be the case. That's too bad, because the resurrection of a character ought to be a momentous event—one that offers great potential for roleplaying. So why do players pass up the opportunity so often? Why the glossing over? The answer probably lies in the fact that most people don't like to think about dying. Christianity is just one of many religions that asserts the philosophy of an afterlife, and people enjoy thinking

that in heaven, life goes on in the same way real life does, only better. It's logical to assume that most players want to get on with the character's new life, and avoid dealing with that messy break known as death.

Some GMs, upon returning the PC to life, give the player some scar or mark. Others even reward characters surviving death with new abilities. These are steps in the right direction, but experience has shown that they are often afterthoughts, meant to signify that something happened—it's just not too clear what. So what actually did take place during the time the PC was dead? No one can answer that question factually, but this is where imagination should take over. What kind of life did the PC leave behind? Did she have unfinished business? Was he violent or peaceful? A warrior or a farmer? Religious or worldly? The moment of death is the one time that a character's

greatest fear rises to the surface; how well the character dies depends on how well he or she deals with that fear.

A character may experience either a "good" death or a "bad" death. A "good" death is one where the PC dies knowing he is loved, feeling at peace with the world and, if relevant, his god. If the character is slowly dying due to disease or a slow wound, she may have time to say goodbye to her loved ones. A sudden death can still be a "good" death; the important point is that the character feels he has lived a good life, and accepts his death.

Not coincidentally, these people are probably the most difficult to resurrect. Their time has come and interfering may be unwelcome. This can make for interesting scenarios: an NPC is brought back to life, and is being forced to serve the "benefactor's" selfish ends. (Lots of people can fill the NPC role: selfish lovers, greedy information seekers, cunning manipulators, etc.). A PC can play the resurrected role, but the GM may want to keep the character out of play for a time to reflect the very real notion of a character's death before returning the PC to the player. If "good" death resurrections are interesting, just think about the possibilities for bad ones. If a character has a second chance to complete unfinished business, how far will he or she go to finish it? Dying can create a sense of urgency that nothing else can match. Even so, there's been so many back-from-the-dead revenge books and movies that avoiding cliché becomes

A Crude Example

Mokshe the Mercenary has had a short, if colorful life. He signed on as a caravan guard after leaving his farm and family in the hopes of becoming a rich and powerful warrior. He's young, but already he's fought off a few barbarians and earned more money than he's ever seen back home. He dreams of travelling the world's most dangerous lands and becoming famous for his fighting prowess. Unfortunately, in only his third outing, the caravan is ambushed by clever, arrow-wielding goblins. He takes three arrows, one in the neck and two to the chest. Mokshe's dreams of being a famous fighter are shattered—he'll never lift a sword again, let alone see any of his friends. This is a "bad" death, although heroic.

Mokshe's father, who cares for him very much, has saved a sum of money over the years, and uses it, along with suitable pleading and promises, to have the boy resurrected. Mokshe returns, much sobered, but still full of dreams and hopes. Now, however, his family is completely destitute, and his father must face the anguish of seeing his son leave once again in pursuit of fame and fortune. Mokshe also bears the mark of resurrection, and his skin is pale; people move aside when he walks the streets. There's also the problem of the priest who resurrected Mokshe; seems Mokshe's father promised his services...

paramount. Still, what is the goal were different? Making amends with a spurned friend, relative or lover; righting a previous wrong; collecting an old debt; returning an item are just a few possibilities. What if people still think the character is dead? What if the lost

love has been cheating all this time? A person back from the dead, especially an anonymous person, becomes privy to the Truth, and that is a great burden to bear. Again, the revenge story has been done to death, but it can still work in a tense, *mysterious* adventure.

In each of these scenarios, keep in mind what happened at the time of death. Was it an ignoble, unheroic death, or did the character go out in a blaze of glory? If the death was unremarkable, would the PC take on a fatalistic bent upon returning to life? A PC that was upbeat to start with might grow a bit more sober, while a despondent, quiet character could become positively morose. If it was a heroic death, the PC might come to some profound realization and as a result grow philosophical. Another type of character might actually become arrogant.

The key concept in all of this is *change*. A character who returns from the dead is not the same character she was before she died. A holy mark or scar is a symbol of that change, but what does that symbol represent?

A resurrection can add dimension to the player character, but it doesn't come cheap. There should be definite consequences to being brought back to life, and many PCs may find their families shun them, or that they are (unjustly or justly) feared by common folk. Anyone who makes the journey back from the land of the dead will know who their real friends are.

StarGate: Whoops.

Time to eat crow. I went to *StarGate* having read the Boston Globe's review stating that it was "good camp." Camp? Argh. My previous excitement dropped to creaking apprehension—I knew I had to cut my losses. And it was a good thing. The movie *looked* great, but suffered hugely in the plot department. An immortal with awesome technology who bothers to keep slaves? A story of the mass exodus an ancient civilization explained in less than two minutes? A bad guy who does little except prance around and make his eyes glow? They couldn't even use Jaye Davidson's real voice. It wasn't completely awful, but it came darn close. The story snapped to attention when the directors let Spader and Russell be characters, but whenever they switched back to cliché-action-adventure movie mode, things got dull and sketchy real fast. I just wish for once, movie directors would decide the kind of movie they want in the beginning, and stay with that. If they want action-adventure, fine, just don't pretend that it's something more profound. And if you're going to tell a serious, dramatic story, don't feel like you need to have the characters pull out blasters just to keep the kiddies entertained. *StarGate* was most interesting when it was telling the human story, and some of the cultural interactions were quite nice. Why not stick with it? Why not be true to the complexities of human nature and culture? Because Hollywood producers—especially SF producers—have

the intellectual capacity of a rock, that's why.

The Puppetmasters: About The Same

The Puppetmasters started out eerily enough. We watch as a few farm kids witness a strange light in the sky, and then an explosion. They run off to check it out, and the next time we see them they've turned into murderous recruiters for the aliens.

For the most part, the director sustained the eerie mood, but, again, here was another movie where they focused more on the action stuff than the psychological effects of having your body taken over. Donald Sutherland plays the head of the agency trying to stop the invasion, and he does a terrific job. His

son—sort of a Christian Slater type, does an okay job playing the possessed son, but we never get a good grasp of his character. When the movie degenerates, again, into action movie territory, it's pretty much predictable. A friend who had just reread the Heinlein book almost walked out of the theater, but it wasn't

quite that bad. You just won't be raving over it, and unfortunately, that's what most SF fans want to be doing these days.

Well, that's it for the movies. I guess the next on the list are *Generations* and *Highlander III*. My expectations are low, but maybe they'll surprise me.

The Art of the One Shot

It was interesting to read Doug Jorenby's experiences last issue regarding finding time in the schedule to do more than one-shot gaming. Running a long-term campaign can be a Herculean effort; I, too, remember those 8 hour gaming sessions on the weekends. There was an air of magic about those days, and it's a bit

disheartening to think that kind of gaming won't return. I don't necessarily think it has to be that way, but reality tells me that it's a lot tougher to get a group of people together on a regular basis when they've all got jobs and family to attend to. The thought of raiding local college campuses for players has crossed



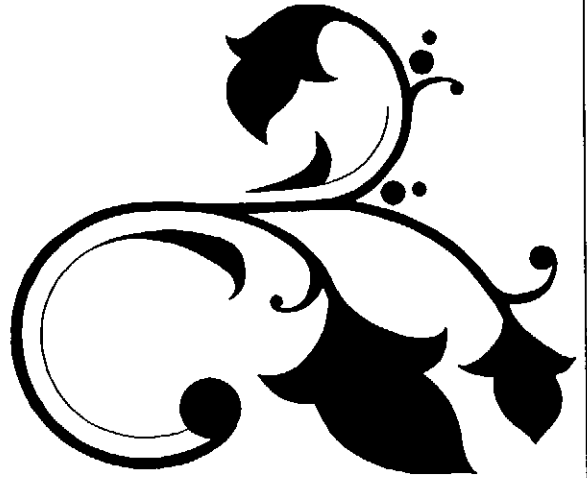
my mind a few times, but I have yet to try it and can't report on how well it might work. But I do believe that finding a group of dedicated players is worth the effort.

On the other hand, if you're completely out of time, a non-serial game can be fun, too. It doesn't have to be a dungeon crawl, either. Keep in mind the military's rules of engagement: a clearly defined goal, a good chance of success and a time limit. This makes for short and intense scenarios that are quite memorable. In this sort of campaign, you can increase the tension in ways you can neglect in a long-term campaign. Let the party know the clock is ticking, and that all hell will break loose if they miss the deadline. A delivery scenario can be lots of fun.

"Transport X person or object to X place by this time tomorrow." Or, "bring X person or object back from X place by this time tomorrow." Add another layer: "kill or destroy object or person X by this time tomorrow." You get the idea.

You can make it more interesting by creating a group of characters that may have ulterior motives that may run counter to the plot-just make sure they're not completely at each other's throats. If the characters are interesting enough, you can bring them back for more scenarios, and make it more of an episodic campaign. Another option is to introduce a new set of characters with very different goals from the first set of PCs; they may even be enemies of the first group. This is a nice way to add dimension to the world, while at the same time preserving

the "one-shot" nature of the campaign. As an aside, these campaigns can work with pre-designed characters, too, as long as the players don't object. I generally ask players what kind of character they like, and then add some short and sweet character notes. This gives players a handle on the PC's personality and motivation, and yet gives them room to "interpret."



Interregnum #7

The Log That Flies

It was interesting reading your thoughts on RPGs as art with a capital 'a.' Roleplaying, when played well, can pass into artistic territory, but it seems that the harder one strives for artistry in roleplaying, the more elusive it becomes. I think it's just better to have fun first, and worry about becoming nobel laureates later. :) ♣ Ah, the FBI is alive and well! At least they didn't bust the door down. Did they enjoy the coffee, I wonder... :) ♣ I hope your Wonder recruiting is going well. It sounds like it's going to be a good game; I'll be interested to hear what's happening in the campaign. I'll second your guesses on the ad. It seems that players get intimidated by really fancy flyers; for some reason the scrawled note is the common language of roleplayers. ♣ "The Ice Ruins" was quite good. I like the fact that not every encounter is a slugfest, and that you work in the hazards of traveling in the cold. I would like find out the cause for the sudden temperature drop. ♣ "In the Box" was weird, but interesting. I'm remembering the holodeck on The Next Generation, and the episode where Geordy falls in love with the professor's "tape." :)

Designing a Role-Playing World

I really enjoyed reading your excellent set of guidelines for creating a world from scratch. I'll be using a good many of your suggestions in the upcoming campaign. It probably wouldn't take much of a stretch to use the same guidelines in creating a science fiction or post-holocaust setting, either. Well done!

Refugee

I'm enjoying the mystery of Elaine's origins and abilities. It will be interesting to see if the Baron will come into play in later chapters. I'm also wondering if Elaine actually has any weaknesses; I assume Grandoon will play a part in the final outcome. Very intriguing—looking forward to more.

Session Notes

The first time we played CoC, we had a similar experience. We'd been sitting around a dark room, lit with just candles; we didn't realize how wound up we were until the GM shouted, "Boom," as a group of Deep Ones crashed into the room and began attacking. :) ♣ You're right though, about throwing in a red herring. Keeping the party guessing is a good way to run any roleplaying game. ♣ I'm downloading a lot of the art. Most of it has been posted for public use, and I was surprised how good the quality of it is.

Who Is John Galt?

Thanks for the info regarding Lord of Terror. Another purchase for the weekend... I just got Tales #12, and is a nice one. Especially liked the Lunar stuff.

Aye, Matey

Some fine reviewing in this issue, mate! Doom II looks to be a fine successor to the first carnage spewing Sandy Peterson contribution. I'm also hoping the fine programming that went into the Doom games will translate into some nifty roleplaying stuff. In the meantime, I'll have to test drive those secret codes... :)

The Eight Track Mind

With a perfect Halloween October and *Interview with the Vampire* about to hit the theatres, the run down on our fanged cousins seemed appropriate. I had an experience with having my character turned into a vampire in a campaign, but unfortunately it didn't work out very well. The GM railroaded my PC's actions so much that I finally got exasperated, handed him the character and started re-rolling. ♣ One of the scariest comic books I ever read was the vampire-as-alien. The ship finds another ship drifting dead in space. You can take it from there. :) ♣ Haven't seen any of the new DS9 season, and am beginning to get withdrawals. Thanks for filling in on the new episodes.

Come visit the beautiful, terrifying island of Hârn. Despite its strangeness, many have chosen to stay in this brutal land, where they say a god still lives beneath the earth, and where shadow beasts still roam the woods. Some travel there for wealth, others seek its mystic power, some just want trouble. But after years of darkness, there is a chance, just a chance, there *will* be something better. And after all, there's nowhere to go but up. Come get yer hands dirty!

Hârn is a "realistic" fantasy setting, where dark things lurk below the seemingly mundane medieval existence. And while the average serf may have not seen fell beasts or horrific demons, legends of such creatures abound. The only difference between he and you is that you know the difference between fable and truth.

We will be using RuneQuest, a roleplaying system that has been around since 1978 when it won the Strategists Club Award for game excellence.

Hârn

It is a fully skill based system where "character class" does not come into play. In addition, we will be using the Harn magic system, where subtlety often wins over brute strength, and no two spells are exactly the same.

If you have played RuneQuest or would like to learn, I will be starting up a game in the next few months. While there will be plenty of action, roleplaying and problem-solving are also going to be important aspects of this campaign. We'll play weekends in Everett.

Please call Gil at home (617) 387-2333 or work (617) 832-7682.

Tales from the Electric Underground

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EDITORIAL NOTE: This magazine is the first of my bi-monthly run. Most of the material was written while *T.F.T.E.U.* #2 was being proofread (a few days before September 1st), so the comic book reviews and some news items in the editorial article are a bit "dated."

PATHWAYS TO GLORY

When I first read through the adventure outlines in the *Pendragon* rulebook, I was amazed at how simple they seemed. In fact, they almost appeared to be *too* simple. Thinking back, I remembered how simple and clear the stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table appeared when I first read them in junior high. There were no 100-level dungeons that the knights had to crawl through; no hordes of slaving orcs to wade through; no meddling halflings getting underfoot. Below are several adventure ideas I wrote for 4th edition *Pendragon*. "The Enchantress, the Frog and the Knight" and "The Blight" are based upon two of the encounters Peter Maranci published in *The Log That Flies* #5 (*Interregnum* #5).

The Enchantress, the Frog, and the Knight

The player-knights comes across a large frog sitting on the side of the road, dying of thirst. The nearest body of water, a small lake, is nearly a mile back. It is a rather good looking frog and is unafraid due to its dehydration. The GM should play on the sorry state of the frog in order to get the PCs to feel sorry for it. If a knight takes the frog back to the water, it leaps into the water and transforms into a beautiful young woman (use the damosel stats found on pg.331). (A good twist would be to have the knights make a *Recognize* roll in order to keep them from mistaking her for the Lady of the Lake.) The young woman thanks the knights for saving her life and tells them her sad story. The woman is the daughter of a prominent trader in a nearby village. The daughter of the local enchantress (use the enchantress stats on pg.332 of the Pendragon rulebook, but with a *Shapeshifting* talent of 6 or greater) was betrothed to the son of a local noble, but the young man only had eyes for the trader's daughter. The trader's daughter was not in love with the noble's son, however. The noble's son fell deeper in love with the trader's daughter each day and soon it was announced that the two would be married. Out of jealousy and greed, the enchantress's daughter begged her mother to make events turn in her favor. In order to help her daughter marry into a wealthy family (and to cease her endless complaining), the enchantress cursed her daughter's "rival." Now the young woman must live in the lake, away from her home and family. When she leaves the lake she is transformed into a frog and will remain a frog until she returns to the lake or the curse is broken.

When the knights ask the enchantress to undo the curse, she asks them a favor (such as overcoming obstacles in order to get the right herbs to break the spell) in return. Should the knights fail, the curse will either remain unbroken or the enchantress will make another challenge to the knights. It is strongly recommended that the knights receive a quest that they can complete on the first try, something that is not too easy, but not impossible either. Once the curse is broken, the young woman may show her gratitude by choosing one of the knights as an amor. In fact, her father may be so grateful that he would be willing to offer her hand in marriage to an eligible bachelor knight.

Glory: The glory points attained for completing the quest are based on the quest itself and the GM's discretion. An additional 100 glory points goes to the bachelor-knight whom the trader's daughter chooses to marry.

The Blight

While on their way to court, the knights come across a priest and several peasants out gathering herbs and other healing plants to cure a wasting disease in their village. The priest (and maybe a few peasants) employs them to help end the blight on their village. While they pick herbs, the knights learn (from either the priest or a peasant) that the local priest's herbal remedies could not cure the disease and not even his prayers could cure its symptoms. At this point, have the knights make a *Folk Lore* roll. Those knights who make successful rolls realize that something supernatural is causing the disease to ravage the village. (If the players deduce this without a skill roll, all the better!) If only one or two knights make a successful roll, they should share their opinion with their fellow knights (the priest can back up the knight(s) if his fellow knights disagree). If none of the knights make a successful skill roll, they hear the peasants mention something about a sorcerer (the GM may want the PCs to make an *Awareness* roll) or the priest tells them he suspects something evil is afoot. The priest or a peasant shows them the way to a tower supposedly inhabited by a sorcerer. (The GM may use "The Adventure of the Tower of the Headless Dead" on pg.327 of the Pendragon rulebook or an adventure of their own design.) Upon slaying the sorcerer (or convincing him to lift the curse), the wasting disease is cured in the village.

Glory: 25 per knight participating in the quest, 100 for completing the quest. If you use "The Adventure of the Tower of the Headless Dead" from the rulebook, be sure to include the glory information from that scenario as well.

The Veil of Tears

The knights come across a lady standing at the side of the road, weeping. When asked why she weeps, she tells the knights that her husband, Sir Briant, ventured into a fog-shrouded faerie glen

known as "The Veil of Tears" three weeks ago and has not returned. Out of love and sadness she has come to this location in hope that he will return.

What do the knights find when they enter the glen?

- * The fog is a glamour created by a sorcerer or other non-Christian magician and Sir Briant is his or her prisoner. To free him, the knights must face one or more tests or riddles posed by Sir Briant's captor. Those failing to correctly answer the riddles or solve the magician's tests become the magician's prisoners. Some tests may be so subtle that the knights may not even know that they are being tested.
- * A lonely faerie or enchantress has created the glamorous fog in hope of attracting an adventuring knight to keep her company. The faerie or enchantress has ensorcelled Sir Briant so that he *wants* to stay with her and will give his life for her if necessary. To free Sir Briant, the player-knights must complete a quest or solve a puzzle posed by Sir Briant's captor. Be careful, though—those who fail in the quest or at the puzzle may become the faerie or enchantress's newest "guest."
- * The knights find many other knights being held by a faerie knight. Each captive knight journeyed into the Veil of Tears to find lost relatives or for adventure. To leave, one of the knights must joust or fight the faerie knight. Win and all the imprisoned knights go free with the player-knights. Lose and the knight fighting the faerie knight becomes his prisoner.

Glory: Glory points vary depending on what challenges the player-knights face.

The Pilgrimage

The knights are asked to escort a group of Christian clergy through dangerous territory to their new abbey. On the trip, the knights must contend with wild animals, bandits, other knights, and a bad monk. All of the encounters receive the standard glory with the exception of any encounters concerning the bad monk (encounters with this rascal are special). The bad monk continually thinks he knows better than the knights and will make their lives (and the lives of the other clergy) miserable with his constant complaints, religious harangues (especially against any non-Christian knights in the group or even against Christian knights who don't live up to his "standards"), and attempts to lead some of the younger clergy astray (both religiously and by taking "shortcuts" through the forest). The GM should do everything he or she can to keep the knights from killing the bad monk or leaving him behind in the wilderness. *Always* remind the player-knights that killing a member of the clergy is a "Bad Thing" and that it can have some rather adverse effects on their image (and perhaps even their Glory). Should they leave him behind, have him pop up again in their midst.

Bad Monk: "My, I'm glad to be back with my brothers. It was certainly nice of that other knight to give me a ride."

Knight: "What 'other knight'?"

Bad Monk: "Why, the same one who's blocking our path!"

Any encounter with the bad monk is meant as comedy relief or as a test of the passions and traits of the knights and the other clergy. As a variant, the GM may elect to make all of the PCs clergy and run the adventure with fewer or less lethal encounters.

Glory: Glory points vary from encounter to encounter. None are received for encounters with the bad monk.

REVIEWS

PRODUCT: *Star Wars Adventure Journal* Vol. 1, Number 3
EDITOR(S): Peter Schweighofer
PUBLISHER: West End Games
SYSTEM: Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game, 2nd edition
STOCK NUMBER: (WEG)41003
PRICE: \$12.00
PAGE COUNT: 286 pages, softcover

When I first heard that West End Games was going to be starting a magazine for players of their Star Wars RPG, I was thrilled and immediately sent away for the writer's guidelines. However, my hopes of publishing my first article in the *Adventure Journal* died when Lucasfilm mandated that WEG could no longer accept material from unsolicited authors. Torqued off, I sent a rather nasty bit of e-mail to their net-representative (this was before "Grand Moff Tarkin" started as their volunteer representative) and told him what I thought of their "New Republic" material and the policy change. The next day I received the typical "We-don't-care-what -you-say.-We-write-the-RPG-stuff-and-that-makes-us-gods." response. From that day on, I decided that I would have no part of their magazine. Unfortunately, I cracked one day while shopping in Sioux City and bought a copy.

The book is filled to the brim with articles and fiction for Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game, some good, some bad, all written by previously solicited authors. The only reasons I bought this issue were:

*"Galaxywide Newsnets"--An article expanding upon the News Network chapter in *Galaxy Guide 9: Fragments from the Rim*. The article explains the distribution process for newsnets and gives several sample broadcasts, most detailing the Ralttir system blockade and its effect on the sector economy. The article also expands upon using newsnet holocasts in your campaign. I was really hoping someone would expand upon the entire concept of the newsnet.

*"Blaster For Hire"--How to run mercenaries in New Republic-era campaigns. Useful for campaigns set during the movies or the *Dark Empire* mini-series. The article delved into many mercenary services and tactics ranging from demolitions to data slicing. It also included a few new pieces of equipment (several different blasters and some shaped charges). I wish I had seen this article as a reference when I was writing "Surfing the Holonet".

*"Outlaw Battle Armor"--An article detailing several different types of powered armor in the Star Wars universe. The article was well-written, but the number of suits listed made the article feel as though I were reading something for G.E.V./Ogre or Battletech instead of an article for Star Wars.

The fiction in the magazine consisted of four to five stories written by different authors. Each story was well written, but I have to admit that I preferred the stories set during the time of the movies over the single "New Republic"-era story. The magazine is well laid out with few advertisements. (The only ones I saw were for SJG's Illuminati Online BBS, the Lucasfilm Fan Club, and several of WEG's other games.) Even though the magazine has some good points, I don't think I'll be buying another issue. \$12.00 for a magazine is a bit steep in my opinion, even if it is a quarterly publication. If I do buy another issue, be sure to have me frozen in carbonite. ;)

PRODUCT: *Judge Dredd* #2 (September '94)
PUBLISHER: DC Comics
WRITER(S): Andrew Helfer
ARTIST: Mike Avon Oeming
PRICE: \$1.95 (\$2.95 Canadian, £1.25 UK)
PAGE COUNT: 32 pages

Well, as you can see, my debate with my wallet has ended and I decided to see what happens

to our friend the Judge. After the climactic confrontation at the end of issue #1, Dredd is held for ransom and given a chance to experience the demented wonders of cybernarcotics. Meanwhile, a ransom note and Dredd's badge are delivered to the police department where his fellow Judges debate whether or not they should fulfill the ransom demands. Back at the crimeboss's hideout, Dredd debates the legality of cybernarcotics with another user while his cadets form a plan to free him. The ending of the story is rather fitting, seeing as how everyone gets what they deserve. Well, maybe not *everybody*. I was rather surprised at the way the story was resolved. The ending presented was rather twisted but was much more satisfying than what I expected. (I truly expected Dredd to jump in, gun blazing, with a malicious grin on his face.) The artwork was excellent, with the exception of a couple of panels which could have been better. All in all, the second issue has made me a believer that *Judge Dredd* will do reasonably well as a DC series.

PRODUCT: *Legionnaires* #17 (August '94)

PUBLISHER: DC Comics

WRITER(S): Mark Waid

ARTIST: Chris Gardner

PRICE: \$1.50 (\$2.00 Canadian, 70p UK)

PAGE COUNT: 22 pages

Well, this book receives my "Huh?" award for taking a trip on the confusing side. To fully explain why *Legionnaires* #17 is so confusing, I guess I should explain the concept of *Zero Hour*. When the DC universe was started, each hero or group of heroes lived on their own version of Earth, in their own separate reality. The only way for heroes to meet was to either travel through space to another Earth or through time to an alternate reality. Then the Crisis came. DC started the landmark "Crisis on Infinite Earths" crossover series and united the DC universe's many heroes in order to stop a disaster that destroyed all but one of the alternate earths. As a result, every hero, young and old, was stuffed into the same reality. Heroes who lived during the 40's appeared 50 years younger than they should have and fought beside their younger successors--the DC universe's reality was forever changed. That is, everyone thought it was changed forever--until now. After "Crisis," the various realities in the DC universe merged, but they didn't do so in a clean manner. Now reality is shifting in imperceptible ways and the heroes of the DC universe must stop these shifts before the reality shifts destroy the universe. When this entire event has passed, every book involved will have had a "zero issue". (The zero issue was once the domain of independent companies such as Image and Valiant.)

Legionnaires #17 begins the Legionnaires's involvement in the Zero Hour crisis and brings the Legion of Superheroes face to face with a group of heroes once thought to be their clones. (In all actuality, the reality shifts started in *Legionnaires* #16.) Reality in the Legionnaires's own universe has shifted drastically, bringing the hero Valor back from the dead, creating new Legionnaires, and killing off Ferro and several other Legionnaires. Several Legionnaires take a time bubble into an altered timeline in an attempt to alert their teammates to the distortions, only to encounter more distortions in reality and several enemies from their past. The artwork in this issue is substandard considering that issues 1-13 were superbly drawn. The story is rather confusing for me because I've never read any of the Legion of Superheroes books or Valor and the Zero Hour crisis makes it even more confusing. For those of you who have read *Legionnaires* since issue #1 like I have, all I can say is, let's ride the storm out. For those who are just starting *Legionnaires*, I offer this advice: buy the back issues and wait for this mess to clear up.

PRODUCT: *Star Trek* #64 (October '94)

PUBLISHER: DC Comics

WRITER(S): Kevin J. Ryan

ARTIST: Rod Whigham

PRICE: \$1.95 US (\$2.75 Canadian, £1.25 UK)

PAGE COUNT: 30

Star Trek has been an off-and-on DC book for me. The first series started after "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan" and was better than Marvel's attempt (which was set after "Star Trek: The Motion Picture"), but at the end of DC's first series there was quite a bit of confusion (such as Kirk

and Thorn.

The artwork is high quality stuff and Jeff Smith has a true flair for storytelling. This is the kind of comic book I would let *any* kid read. Some people might say that \$2.95 is too much for a black and white comic book, especially the eighth printing of the first issue. In my opinion, the artwork and storytelling in *Bone* is worth every cent.

PRODUCT: *Tales of the Jedi: The Freedon Nadd Uprising* #1 of 2 (August '94)

PUBLISHER: Dark Horse Comics

WRITER(S): Tom Veitch

ARTIST: Tony Akins and Denis Rodier

PRICE: \$2.50 US (\$3.50 Canadian)

PAGE COUNT: 25

WARNING: *Fans who have not read Tales of the Jedi should read it before reading this review. This review contains several spoilers from Tales of the Jedi.*

Following on the heels of Dark Horse's *Tales of the Jedi* mini-series, *The Freedon Nadd Uprising* is the link between *Tales of the Jedi* and the two upcoming *Dark Lords of the Sith* mini-series. (Dark Horse Comics split the twelve issue series into two six-issue mini-series because they have never been consistent with their shipping schedules.) The book starts off on the world of Onderon, which is in the thrall of a war between worshipers of the dead Sith Lord, Freedon Nadd, and the Jedi Knights. Government officials are moving the remains of Queen Amanoa (a practitioner of the Sith way who died in the issue #2 of *Tales of the Jedi*) and Freedon Nadd to a ship so they can be buried on one of Onderon's moons, breaking the grip the Dark Side has on Onderon. Master Arca has summoned Jedi from across the galaxy to assist in bringing Onderon into the light, but the war is going badly. While the remains of Amanoa and Freedon are being moved, Sith warriors, led by a Dark Jedi, attack the convoy, stealing the remains of both Freedon Nadd and Queen Amanoa. The power of the Dark Side shocks Arca and his students (the Qel-Droma brothers and Tott Doneeta) and so they decide to see King Ommin, the dying husband of Queen Amanoa. During their visit, Freedon Nadd appears in spirit form and gives Ommin the strength to attack Master Arca away while the other three Jedi are confronted again by the Dark Jedi. Ulic Qel-Droma dispatches the Dark Jedi, but they are too late to save Arca, who has disappeared with King Ommin.

Seeing that their mission on Onderon is in jeopardy, Ulic elects to call in more Jedi and alert the forces of the Republic. The story then shifts to the Adega system, the supposed point of origin of the Jedi Knights. Here, Master Thon has brought Nomi Sunrider and her daughter Vima to learn the ways of the Force from Master Vodo-Siosk Bass. Nomi learns quickly and builds her first lightsaber, using the crystals her late husband Andur was going to give Master Vodo as a gift. However, Nomi's time on Adega is short and she is picked to be part of a five-Jedi team bound for Onderon.

The story then shifts to Republic City on Coruscant, where the Republican Senate is debating whether or not to send troops to Onderon in order to stop the unrest there. Meanwhile, Aleema and Satal Keto, two founding members of the Krath (a group of bored, young aristocrats dabbling in the Sith) explore the dangerous wonders and history of the Sith in one of the Republic's many museums. The two steal a small tome on the Dark Side and then travel to Onderon to translate the arcane writings.

I have been waiting anxiously for this followup and I am really anxious to see the conclusion and the next two mini-series (*Dark Lords of the Sith*). However, I was a bit disappointed with the artwork and some of the story in this book. Although the book is graced by another excellent cover by Dave Dorman, the internal artwork (produced by Tony Akins and Denis Rodier) in *Freedon Nadd* is a step down from the artwork produced by Chris Gossett and Dave Roach in *Tales of the Jedi*. Some of the characters were drawn differently from the way they appeared in *Tales* and some concepts, such as the spirit-form of Freedon Nadd himself and the lightsaber battles could have been handled better. The amount of detail used in drawing some of the characters is good in a few panels, but in general, I've seen better. The color was quite vivid throughout the book, which is wonderful to see because several batches of *Tales of the Jedi* had a bad press run and were released with faded colors. Some things in the

story really, *really* concern me. First of all, the Dark Side is occasionally referred to as "Dark Side magic" or "Sith magic" while Dark Jedi are sometimes referred to as "Dark Side magicians." Wake up Tom Veitch! The Force is *not* a form of magic! Aside from that, there were a few corny lines between the two Krath aristocrats which undermine their group's intelligence and sinister intentions.

Dark Horse Comics has done a wonderful job with Star Wars, but it appears that in their rush to support both old and new fans of the trilogy they have allowed a dangerous error to creep into the picture—an error which distorts the way some fans look at the Force and possibly even the Star Wars universe. *Freedom Nadd* picks up a lot of *Tales of the Jedi*'s spirit, but the flaws in it are keeping a good book from becoming a great one. Let's hope the next issue of *The Freedom Nadd Uprising* and the next two mini-series don't run into the same problems.

MISCELLANEOUS MUSINGS

NOTE: This is strictly an opinion piece. The statements made in this article do not represent the opinions of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), the CAR-PGa (Committee for the Advancement of Role-Playing Games), or the gaming community at large (both on and off the Internet), they are simply my own thoughts on the subject. Readers and contributors to *Interregnum* who wish to discuss this topic (or any other editorial topic) with me, are free to do so through snail- or e-mail as long as they do so in a civil manner. "Flames" and other uncivilized mail will be directed to File 13 (a.k.a. the wastebasket).

Well, this summer I had some time to contemplate some of the stranger subjects on the Internet and some questions and problems I've run into about gaming. I'd appreciate some input on any or all of these subjects either through the *Interregnum* or snail- or e-mail.

TSR versus the Internet

Well, TSR has done the unthinkable. In a move which shocked many gamers, TSR declared open season on all FTP (File Transfer Protocol) sites holding home-brew materials for AD&D. For weeks on end a storm raged on rec.games.frp.dnd. One side screamed, "Censorship!" while the opposing side (including Tim Repp who is supposedly TSR's "net-rep") supported TSR's move under the banner of copyright law. In response to TSR's move, many gamers gave up AD&D in favor of other systems such as Skyrealms of Jorune, Earthdawn, GURPS and Rolemaster. At least two separate net-RPG projects sprang up as a form of protest and even GenCon bore the brunt of this controversy. TSR reportedly set up a seminar on the Internet controversy and some gamers planned on wearing black ribbons or armbands as a form of visible protest.

Now comes the \$64,000 question—do I really care? Yes and no. I say no because I don't buy many TSR products (with the exception of the *Monstrous Compendium* for Mystara and an occasional issue of *Dragon Magazine*, which is beginning to cost more than it's worth). I also say yes because TSR is infringing on the creativity and freedom of its customers. What good is it to create a new world, spell or monster if you can't share it? Material on the Internet is a great resource for those of us who have tight gaming budgets and access to the network. Case in point: I recently bought the 4th edition *Pendragon* rules and now I have to save up for textbooks for my college classes. Instead of waiting two or three months to buy the supplements I want, I checked out the *Chaosium Digest* archives on ftp.csua.berkeley.edu. By downloading the archived issues, I found 16 adventures and 41 articles for 3rd and 4th edition *Pendragon*. This saved me \$241.95 (I came to this total by figuring that each article would cost \$3.95 if each one was printed in a single issue of *Dragon Magazine* and each adventure would cost \$5.00 (four adventures per book of adventures). I have also found that some materials posted by players and GMs are better written and show more creativity than some company products. Steven Cavanaugh's Star Wars RPG stories and the Net Star Wars Sourcebook found in the [/starwars/SWRPG](http://starwars/SWRPG) directory of wpi.wpi.edu's FTP site can attest to that. It appears to me that TSR realizes that gamers on the net are saving a lot of money and merely want to preserve the profit margin for their increasingly inferior products.

White Wolf versus Steve Jackson Games

A few weeks ago, Steve Jackson posted a scathing letter to rec.games.frp.misc (a letter which I didn't see) because of White Wolf's actions in their joint effort to produce the GURPS version of *Mage: The Ascension*. Steven Wieck, the president of White Wolf, subsequently posted a vague rebuttal which stated that White Wolf was unwilling to comment on their actions and that Steve Jackson had acted in poor judgment. While I do not know (and I *don't* want to know) the full details of this corporate temper tantrum, I would just like to say that I believe both presidents acted poorly. By posting their dirty laundry to the Internet in an attempt to get back at each other, they have set a bad example for both the industry and the hobby in general.

The Lonely Gamer's Lament

Well, like I said in my introduction ("*First Things First*," *Tales From The Electric Underground* #1), being a college student in Iowa makes it hard to find other gamers. I have a number of problems ranging from unanswered requests to conflicting schedules and I wish I could find some solutions to some or all of them.

First of all, let me just say that I have GM'ed four games, two of them very successful. The first was an extended session of *Toon* in which I ran (more like winged) three or four adventures from the *Toon* rulebook for two of my friends from high school (this was during Christmas break of my freshman year at B.V.). The second was a session of *Paranoia* in which I ran a solo adventure with two players.

Both of my flops involved *Toon*. The first involved a new player who didn't fully understand the concept of a roleplaying game. When his character took a swing at the Off-White Knight's pet dragon, he [the player] suddenly decided for me that the dragon would run away! My second flop came this summer when I ran a session of *Toon* for a couple of good friends from high school. It seemed as though we were all too serious at the time and none of us could get each other to laugh! This is a relatively minor problem compared to the ones I face in starting a group.

During my sophomore year I worked hard to try and start my first on-campus gaming group. I posted to rec.games.frp.misc (with apologies about the distribution) and to a campus newsgroup (bvc.talk) along with sending e-mail to several of my friends who I thought would be interested. I received four responses, which I thought was very good and began to set things up. However, we could never get the whole group together. Either one member had a shift at the campus radio station or another suddenly made plans for the weekend (we had agreed that we would meet on the weekends in order to keep our hobby from interfering with our academic lives). As a solution, I proposed a PBEM (play by e-mail) campaign for *Brand-X Superheroes* (a "freeware" RPG found on the Internet). I wrote down notes on several characters and did some research (even though I'm a comic book collector, I had never run a superhero RPG before) and worked on the campaign background, but the campaign died on the drawing table because everybody was busy with one thing or another.

Finding players is another problem altogether. Sure, I can always count on several of my friends at B.V. to be interested, but most of them don't have experience with actual RPGs, just MUDs or other computer adventure games where hack-and-slash is the key to survival rather than real roleplaying (I take that back to a certain degree—one guy actually does very well in *Paranoia*—he can scream "Hairy purple spiders! Hairy purple spiders!" while looking drugged out. It works perfectly when his Troubleshooter runs into a malfunctioning docbot or encounters one of the Computer's wonderful sanity tests). I'm not saying that there are no gamers on the B.V. campus or that I haven't limited my search to just the B.V. campus. This summer I did post a "Players/GMs Wanted" notice at a hobby shop, but I haven't received any answers to it. What I'm looking for are players (and maybe a GM or two) who roleplay instead of roll-play and who would be willing to give some helpful tips

However, all is not lost. My roommate called all the way from Bonaparte, Iowa one night and he did mention that he has played AD&D, *Rifts*, and one or two other RPGs. Hopefully we'll have time to form a group (whether or not he joins the White Hall group is his decision, not mine), but if not, so be it. . .

I would appreciate some solutions and tips problems both from readers and contributors. I'll let you know what happens.

A LETTER TO THE ELECTRIC UNDERGROUND

I recently received a piece of e-mail in response to the editorial which appeared in issue #1 ("Is White Wolf Going Too Far?"). Below is the entire text of the letter (including the electronic tag).

Date: Mon, 29 Aug 1994 17:18:38 -0400 (EDT)
From: Charon09@aol.com
Subject: White Wolf
To: meierdalepau@bvc.edu

This letter is not meant to be offensive, and I hope it will not be construed as such. . .

I recently read your 'zine in IR, and noted with interest your opinion piece on White Wolf's advertising/games/etc. I think that you are perhaps being too extreme in your opinions about White Wolf's games. I have to disagree with your opinions on this subject.

Some of the subject matter in WW's games might not be appropriate for small children, or for the moral majority, but I don't think that they are trying to promote or support these activities. They publish what they publish for the enjoyment of their readers, not to start occult movements.

In your article you say that WW's games are on the line between reality and the supernatural. When you put forth this attitude you are in essence agreeing with most of the people who are against RPGs, on the grounds that they convert people to satanism. That is obviously not true, as I know of no gamers who have more than a passing interest in the occult.

In your 'zine you say that a local minister might be offended by WW's material. Perhaps I live in a different culture than you, but the last time I went to church I didn't bring along any RPGs.

I do not mean to cut down on your 'zine, as it was well written and thought-provoking (as evidenced by this letter). I just think that you should consider the following possibility: White Wolf is a company dedicated to providing entertainment. If the way they choose to provide the entertainment is different from "mainstream" RPGs, so be it. Not every company has to be a carbon copy of TSR. Thank you for your time. . .

charon09@aol.com

Charon,

I'm sorry if my editorial seemed to be a bit extreme and off-the-wall. I guess there were a few points I should have made a bit clearer. First of all, I agree that White Wolf's games aren't for everyone and that they have the right to choose their own way of making a profit. If every company was a carbon copy of TSR, I mean TSR, the hobby would probably stagnate (and nobody would be able to upload stuff to the FTP sites). Also, I wasn't really saying that White Wolf was trying to start an occult movement or that I agree with the Fundamentalists. I was trying to point out the danger White Wolf's material presents to the hobby should Pat Pulling or any other member of the anti-RPG movement finds out about it. As far as drawing the line between reality and the supernatural, as a Christian, I believe that there are forces of good and evil that we can't see and that if we mess with things we don't understand (such as magick) we are opening ourselves up to a lot of (spiritual) trouble. This is why I am opposed to the content of White Wolf's games. Thank you for your input.

COLOPHON

Tales From The Electric Underground was created on a Macintosh LC III using ClarisWorks 2.0v1 and a StyleWriter II printer. Special thanks goes to Michelle Millard who did the proofreading.

Session Notes #22 Douglas E. Jorenby

Bread And Wine

I'm afraid that despite my appreciation for various aspects of Asian culture, I won't be contributing any haiku to this issue of *Interregnum*. I lack the discipline of a true poet, and the fickle muse has failed to move me in the past few weeks. Hence, our esteemed editor will have to carry the poetic torch for this issue. I'm sure he'll do well.

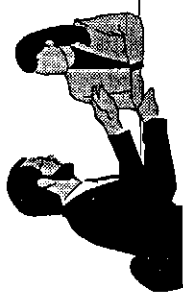
*Feasting is the flame in midwinter
That kindles the fire of friendship
And strengthens the community.*

-- Deng Ming-Dao

This is the invocation I've used to begin Thanksgiving dinner for the last several years. Madison being a university town, there are always people who are unable to get to where their families are, or those who have no family to join, when Thanksgiving comes around. Something I learned years ago from my family (my father being a campus pastor) was that a good Thanksgiving dinner was even better when you could share it with someone. I've tried to honor that ideal of an "orphans' Thanksgiving" in the years since by inviting friends to share the feast with me. It adds a great deal to a day that might otherwise be just a celebration of gluttony or endless football games.

It struck me earlier today that the sharing of food has significance far beyond one day out of the year. As I wrote last issue, our group has switched to playing multi-player board games for a while due to continuity concerns. In some respects, I enjoy this more than role playing. I don't feel a pressure to develop adventures or other campaign material; all that's needed is to get out the game *d'jour* and have everyone set up their pieces. It's also nice in that we have more opportunities to just chat. In a multi-player game there's always a certain amount of downtime as someone organizes pieces, plans strategies, or attempts to exert telekinetic influence over the dice. ☺ Speaking out of character in RPG detracts from the feel of the game, but is very helpful in passing the time during a board game.

Because all the players aren't involved all the time, food is more of a relevant concern as well. Unless the players in an RPG split into small subgroups, everyone needs to be present most of the time the game is being played. This results in "group breaks" where play ceases entirely. When only a few players are necessary to resolve





OK....so it's not Halloween Oreos. Cut me some slack, eh?

actions at any one moment, there's a steady flow of people passing food around the table, or heading out to the kitchen to nibble on something or to refill their drinks. The physical logistics seem well-suited for this. We've been playing at my place of late. It works well, as I have a large dining room with a table that easily accommodates even a large game for 6-7 players. The kitchen is immediately adjacent (through a doorway), making it an excellent place for those tricky strategic negotiations or impromptu peace conferences.

At least three of the regulars are serious coffee drinkers, so they can be depended upon to make regular pilgrimages to the shrine of the great god Methylxanthine. I suppose if I was more devious, I could make access to the Krups continent upon in-game concessions; on the other hand, that strategy might backfire. A deprived caffeine addict can be a dangerous thing. ☺ The rest of us are less predictable, either heading to the fridge for soda or water, or heating water to make tea or cocoa. Whatever the choice, making sure that everyone has something to drink is an important part of the game.

Food is even more of a social bond. Often it's something simple, like a bag of pretzels passed around the table. Or it may be something curious, like the bag of Halloween Oreos that was greeted with cries of "Ewwww....," but disappeared without a trace. Every so often (but not as often as I'd like), it's something made especially for the purpose of sharing with the group, like the homemade salsa I thought was too hot for almost everyone (the only thing that spared any of it was running out of chips), or a fresh-baked apple pie (need I say more?). In many ways, food is more of a social bond than gaming is. It's just diluted by the fact that we don't have to game alone, if forced to, to survive.

Part of the switch to board gaming involves more predictable hours. We agree to start at a specific time (in theory, if not in practice ☺), and have a fixed endpoint. Role-playing tended to be more open-ended, at least to the point where people started nodding off. Wrapping up the formal game at a specific time opens the possibility of the group having a meal together afterwards. To me, this is one of the most satisfying parts of the social ritual. I think it harkens back to my college gaming days, when the group would go out for pizza and debriefing following a Saturday afternoon and evening of gaming. It's a great way to relive the best moments of the day and to get feedback on what worked and what didn't. It certainly helps to bring the group together as a social unit.

Well.....this seems to have strayed more than a little from the original topic. ☺ I know that Peter Maranci has quite a reputation as not only an excellent ref and hard-working editor, but also is famed for whipping up a mean Sunday barbecue for his players. I'm curious as to what role food plays in the gaming groups of other *IR* contributors.

Comments On Interregnum #7



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Maranci: I'm surprised that you haven't had any responses to your ad for the Wonder campaign, Pete. Given the number of systems on the market that survive on style over substance, you'd think there would be lots of people waiting to bite at a slick advert. ☺ I enjoyed the very twisted short story, as well. I'll never be able to play *SimCity* with a clear conscience again, you know, now that you've revealed the truth about Sims.

By the way, I'm not at all surprised that you passed on shelling out US\$30 for *Castle Falkenstein*. I find more and more that I'm unwilling to part with my money for a game that is of equivocal interest. Maybe I'm just getting old and cynical, eh?

Staats: Nice return as Pete's "special guest star." The outline format was a bit odd to read, but I certainly can't blame you for using it. E. Gary Gyax prattled on for an entire book and said less of value on world design. Out of curiosity, what was the context for the seminar you gave?

Phillies: Testing child-abused chimps, eh? That's a new and different approach to intelligence testing. Have you applied for federal grant support on this? ☺ I suspect that the latter part of your comment to me was actually intended for Gil Pili. Ω The reference to tenure politics in the Academy had me laughing out loud.



"I take the Stanford-Binet, therefore I am."

Taylor: Regarding *Space 1889*, I think you're right on target. Part of what struck me about that product was the negative contrast effect in the art. David R. Deitrick's work in both color and B&W was excellent (if somewhat stylized for the period)...but then there were those Frank Chadwick drawings. A-hem. It's a pity that no one at GDW suggested Mr. Chadwick restrict himself to the word processor. The rules also left a lot to be desired. Somehow they managed to capture the least appealing elements of GDW's complexity and R. Talsorian's simplicity. The basic idea was captivating, though. I



I dunno.....the whole concept makes me nervous, somehow.



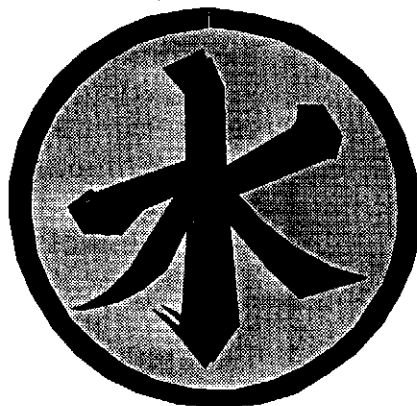
Probably because you need to flesh it out a bit before it really gets under your skin.

notice there has been a reasonable amount of Net traffic about using different rules systems (esp. *GURPS*) to run *Space 1889*.

Pili: Outstanding piece on the horror genre! You did a much better job of expressing what I was thinking than I did. I particularly liked your ideas on applying horror in the fantasy setting. It's surprising how rarely that is done (or at least done well), given the number of horrific creatures found in the typical fantasy setting. It's likely because they are treated as cannon fodder, as you pointed out. Ω I had repressed most of my memories of Ken Russell's *The Devils* until you mentioned it. <shudder> That was a horrifying film, indeed, without the use of a single supernatural creature. My memory of it also suggests there was a significant subtext about the corrupting influence of power, which might lend itself well to your campaign ideas. Great job!

Ferrier: Hahahahahahahahahahaha! Your one-line summaries of the various computer games were a hoot! "Kill everything and save the world" -- isn't that the *Cliff's Notes* version of every Nintendo game ever made? ☺ If you've a bit of a strategic bent, I would recommend Microprose's *Master Of Magic*. It's still rather buggy (as of the v1.1 patch), but it's an incredible amount of fun.

Greene: A very diverse collection of vampire alternatives, indeed. Given the grounding most players have in undead lore, it's nice to have some uncertainty about what, exactly, is going on. The idea of players exposing a "vampire" to sunlight, only to discover said creature is just a person with a peculiar psychosis has a wicked appeal to it. ☺ Thanks for the *ST:DS9* summary, as well. I haven't been motivated to stay up at watch it since the first season (it's on at 2230 here in Madison), so your notes brought me back up to speed. Check in next season?



REFUGEE

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The contents of this zine include fiction and commentary. I would include *Communications*, Letters to the Editor, in which I publish letters or comments from correspondents, if by some chance I ever received one from the readership.

Commentationes

The Log That Flies: The Horror was really clever. We take it that you were not locked up with the Marilyn Monroe icon, or you would perhaps not complain quite as much. Actually, by modern standards her figure (perhaps most remembered because she was the artist's image for Walt Disney's version of Tinkerbell) was perhaps a trifle underdefined. The female costar of *Maverick* and *The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane* comes immediately to mind as an improvement.

Roleplaying is art, and because our culture venerates art, roleplaying is a venerable part of our culture. Note however the great divide that has passed between true American culture and the culture of the literati. The romantic novel, one of the two great stems of the novel beginning with Cervantes, is rejected as a theme. The rejection reaches even to tense. The modern literary novel, confined in theme to the here and now, is by rigid convention written in *present* tense, while most romantic novels (includes SF, westerns, mystery, romances, and other genre fiction) are now and always have been written in past tense. Note the writings of Modesitt. Modesitt (*The Magic of Recluse*, etc.) writes all of his sciencefiction novels in the present tense. Modesitt deliberately attempts to conjoin the sphere of the true novel and the sphere of the literaic novel; to convince the literati of the worth of the romantic novel, he feels himself constrained to ape the styles of the literati and glitterati of the fictional world.

Designing an FRP World: Really well laid out, at least as a set of reminders. This deserves much wider publication, in other APAs, or via the Net.

Session Notes: Well, the visitors from mystic forbidden California are going to arrive here in late November and inflict themselves on several local gaming groups. I will thus be able to report on what happens when unrelated interpretations of the same game interact. Yes, next issue, *When Rules Collide!*. The current complication is that the illustrious GM is not very fond of people in battlesuits, but what was sent to me was that previous wearers of battlesuits had been tactically clueless adherents to the *Law of Captains*. [Law of Captains: if a Champions character has a public persona name beginning 'Captain', the character will have the brains of a small kitchen appliance of the Truman administration.] Naturally, Kampfgruppe California took this as a personal challenge; they feel obliged to restore the honor of all wearers of armored suits. Of course, the first question sent me was 'Bubblegum Crisis Armor or Mechton Armor?' Actually, having seen several minutes of Power Rangers, I have a clear answer: Giant robots that sumo wrestle is silly.

Actually, the B49 was more effective against the Martians than against the Russians. The Martians at least had to turn on their defenses. The Russians were perhaps aware of the unfortunate difficulty that the designers of the flying wing were not supplied with specifications for the shape or size of an atomic bomb; the B35 (and, I infer, the B49) bombbay was unable to accomodate any atomic bombs of the era, making it an ideal weapon to be shown in a Hollywood film. Of course, they might also have wheeled out the B-60, which was a six-jet swept-wing version of the B-36, a low-tech B-52, just as the B-32 was a low-tech version of the B-29.

Strange Sands: Good description of horror. The trick is not to appear contrived, e.g. the Hollywood car that will never start when the monster is approaching.

Aye Matey: Interesting reviews. Writing is like long distance running. You have to get into it a bit at a time, and force yourself.

The Eight Track Mind: The Vampires of the Mexican Nostrodomnus series were, besides being cursed, infected with bacillus vampirus, which allowed their wounds to clot instantly. Pray tell, whatever did happened to the Borg? Did the Ferengi buy them?

Fiction

* * * * *

CHAPTER FOUR (Elaine, Men)

Elaine awoke. For a few moments she listened to the birds in the distance. Even this late in the fall, she knew the hour from their calls. It was late. The morning sun, hidden in the pines, no longer touched the horizon. She had simply slept through the sunrise. A roll onto her back

permitted a survey of the clearing. She was painfully stiff. Fighting Morgan, the cursed blade scrambling every swordthrust, demanded her peak effort in timing and strength. If she had employed simple steel, he would have fallen in moments. Against the spells in her sword, she fared less well.

She began a series of gradual stretching exercises. Grandoon had taken her to be no more than sixteen. Reality was considerably older. Self-healing repaired even the worst damage of every combat, leaving her skin and complexion as fair and scarless as that of a farm girl tending a dairy. The last fraction of recovery from her hurts, a fraction not visible from outside, took longer. Every strain, every bone-bruising fall onto plaza tile or paving stone, even her thirty-foot dive into the depths of the Tressin had left a reminder in her joints and tendons. She was not arthritic yet; still, experience taught that careful limbering smoothed the day's travel.

The night's sleep usually cured the worst aches and pains. Tonight, though, a strong infusion of willowbark tea would clearly be in order. She knew she was as fast now as a dozen or more years ago, but twinges while working through a sword drill reminded her that speed was not painless any more.

Her dreams last night had haunted her. She had been walking through sand dunes along the edge of a lake, searching for something she couldn't remember, something she couldn't name even while she searched for it. Tiny waves rolled up to the shore. She looked down through them, seeing isolated water-weeds floating above the sandy bottom. The dunes and lake were real. She had been there once, when she was much younger. There had been a reason, now forgotten, for the visit.

A search of her pack uncovered traveller's biscuits and a canteen of cold tea. Last night had been terribly depressing, so that sleep was a welcome release from her cares. Now she just felt drained. Elaine nibbled on a biscuit, trying to focus her thoughts. She felt her mind floating, almost as though she were leaving the ground. Odd. She associated that particular floating sensation with the aftermath of the the most violent battles, the sort where spellcraft — mage dueling mage — had unleashed power enough to shatter mountains and set rivers flowing backwards in their courses. But there hadn't been any spellcraft to speak of, not yesterday, anyway. What was setting her off?

She put her mind on a more constructive course. She had not been terribly calculating, not for the past several weeks. She'd saved the Duke's city for him, frustrating the ambitions of Pyrrin Apostate. She'd stopped Pyrrin before. Having completed her task, she should have claimed a reward and disappeared tracelessly. She had stayed, neither denying that she'd saved Arburg —

mayhap averting the Duke's jealousy, though she doubted that — nor using her moment of glory to gain riches, weapons, or better trail food. Grandoon's library, one of the best-stocked collections on thaumaturgy she'd ever been allowed to use, held her enthralled. She remained in Arburg to read, careless of the difficulties that always arose when she lived too long in a single place.

What had happened in Arburg? Pyrrin's agents must have labored for years to put the elements into place. First, he'd brought the Guild Syndics to open revolt. Having taken control, his minions debased every custom, abused every privilege, and terrorized the people, performing every act of terror down to importing mercenaries to maintain public order. Pyrrin planned to wait until all hated the ways of their forefathers; then he would arrive to save the city from itself. After destroying a city's faith in its own customs, he would install new customs of his own, notably the democratic abominations he so loved. Pyrrin, protector of liberty, said that he merely advised elected rulers as to the path of true wisdom. Of course, those who ignored his advice might find themselves declared immature, unfit to rule.

Under Pyrrin, enemies of the people would have been subjected to moral rectification. Unreconstructed local nobility and clergy, Gowists especially, had appointments with the headsman. All after proper trials, naturally, in the course of which the doomed confessed to heinous misdeeds, some of which they perhaps had even committed. Centuries of established order would be replaced by Pyrrin's mobocracy. The populace had the illusion of power; Pyrrin sat behind the scenery pulling strings. The new democratic government would even be better than the monstrosity it replaced. Pyrrin's first group of flunkies, those he planned to overthrow himself, were always terrible rulers, sent to do their misdeeds and be pensioned off in the Sapphire Isles.

This time Pyrrin failed. The petty princelings and City Senates of the Tressin valley had foresight: if they did nothing together they'd eventually fight separately. For all that the Dorrance Academy affected neutrality to the affairs of this world, Grandoon had been more than slightly helpful. Not by casting spells; the fall of the tower was her deed, its protections ineffective against her. Once the Gate Tower fell, even mediocre wizards were enough to break the city's defenses. Just as well that people tended to forget her passage through the midst of battle. If her limitations became well-known, there were simple effective defenses against her particular abilities.

Where did all this politicking leave her? Sitting under a pine tree on a late fall morning, nibbling at hardened waybread, was not the usual hero-tale, ending with hero ensconced in a palace. A palace really wasn't what she wanted. She had suffered through being thanked and praised for her deeds, always wishing that the thankers

would keep their words short. She thought she'd kept those wishes carefully to herself. No matter how airily polite she was, though, people thanked her on one day and cheerily turned on her the next.

Last night Grandoon suggested why people disliked her. The events afterwards lay in her memory like a series of fevered dreams. Had she really spoken with magespeech, seen with magesight? It was unreal. She was not a mage!

It would be easy enough to find out if those things had really happened. They were obviously dreams, no matter that the memories seemed as solid as any others. Here, in a forest devoid of human habitation, with few travellers on the road, she could safely lower her aura for a few moments. Assuming, that is, that she could lower her aura at all. She remembered doing it in a fit of anger, not even being careful about forming the Rune of Opening. Surely she could do it again, acting without haste or the pressure of time?

She leaned back against the tree, willing each of her muscles to relax. The sky was a luminous blue, filling her complete field of vision. The blankness brought memories of earliest childhood, of first waking in her bedroom, her mother by her side. No longer distracted by thoughts of the world, she tried calling the Rune of Opening, exactly as she had done last night.

The Rune was a soaring sheaf of outbound arrows, the creak of swinging hinges, the flare of light from shutters first flung open to the dawn. It formed as a lacework of interlocked ever-expanding circles, swimming into focus before her. She concentrated on each detail of its pattern, every dovetailing of circle and line, taking into herself the rune's nature and form. Its form was correct; she knew it was correct.

Nothing happened. Nothing at all.

Elaine waited, gradually realizing that she had a deep headache. She released the rune, closed her eyes, and massaged her temples. What was different between now and then? The only possible differences were those which made her calling this morning the more powerful. Runes summoned in haste and anger often misfired; those called calmly and clearly were always strongest. Perhaps sharing thoughts with Grandoon had been a dream. But why had she dreamed? Why had she dreamed of magespeech, of all things? Though if she were going to have a dream with Grandoon in it, her memories of last night were the only dream that sounded vaguely plausible.

Yes, the part of her memories involving magespeech and magesight must have been a dream, one cleverly concocted by her active imagination, but a dream nonetheless. The Rune of Opening had not parted the shadows around her, not this morning, no matter what she imagined last night. Assuming all had been a dream

made more sense than believing she had briefly gained the power of the mageborn, contrary to every other experience of all her life.

Now what should she do? She stood and slipped on her pack, its weight nearly matching her own. The floating sensation returned, stronger than ever. She held her breath, waiting for it to subside. Joints in her back settled quietly under the load. A knight might don full armor and clatter about on horseback. She couldn't even cast horsecalm; no beast would long bear her. A pack mule was possibly, but inconvenient for long trips; at the next major town, she might take passage on a riverboat.

For a long walk she preferred to keep chain mail and padding in her pack, its weight resting firmly on her hips. So long as she was careful with the fold of her cloak and the pitch of her voice, she could pass for a boy, run away with home with little beyond sword and bow. Even very desperate bandits seldom thought it worthwhile to try robbing her.

Grandoon was gone. His guest house had crushed the grass. Footsteps led to the guest house, but a careful search revealed no sign of his departure. Then she saw a line of crushed branches in the trees. "Gosh," she said to herself, "I never thought his house might fly."

* * * * *

In late afternoon there came the tap of hoofbeats behind her. This soon after a minor war, the highway was virtually untravelled. Could it be the Baron, she wondered? Back with more bully-boys? She wouldn't have guessed the Baron had the nerve. He ought to have scuttled back to town to create an alibi.

Whoever was behind her certainly did not travel very fast. She was not setting that stiff a pace, for her ribs continued to remind her of yestereve and the day previous, but even a cautious wayfarer with mediocre mount ought soon have overtaken her. Someone tracking her would not, of course, elect to pass her. Elaine's curiosity finally demanded an explanation. Picking a rise with thick woods to either side, she leaned back on a tree-stump to wait.

In a world of unique sights, the figure which finally came into view was astonishing, even to Elaine's jaded eyes. A knight in plate mail riding a barded warhorse, with second mount and mules in tow, was not that rare. This far from town, most men spared their mount part of the weight. The horses, however, were not simply barded. From head to foot, from nose to tail, they were wrapped in their own carefully articulated armor plate. How could the horses stand the weight and heat, she wondered? The armor had to be enchanted in some unique way, marking its owner as one of fabulous wealth, or a collector of peculiar tastes.

Fifty paces down the road, the horses paused. There was

a flicker of motion; Elaine found herself facing a man carrying a black wand and what was almost certainly a hand cannon. He must not have been chasing her; he seemed not to have noticed her until a moment before. Without apparent urging, the horses began pacing toward her.

"Good day!" she called out. "I'm not a bandit, that you need weapons against me." Her words would not be very convincing; her mind reposed behind its aura. Any conventional probe would report that she hid her mind, so her honesty could not be ascertained.

"Furthermore, young man," the rider responded, "You are entirely alone out here. I'm not afraid, merely taking a few elementary rational precautions."

"Elementary?" she asked, trying to keep her voice pitched down. Young man? He thought she was a male, then; she had no reason to disillusion him. Whoever he was, he really did have a hand cannon pointed in her direction. Either he was an enormous fool, or his shields against spellcraft were remarkably thorough. At this distance, an unblocked tindspark spell – which, of course, she had never cast in her life – would be enough to detonate all the gunpowder that he carried.

"A few little trinkets, a Harrek's death projector, a pistol, – after all, you might really be a dangerous brigand."

"Me? By myself?" She was ready to laugh. A Harrek's Death Projector was powerful enough to slaughter a substantial army with attendant fourth-rate mages in close formation. "Don't you ever worry someone will use firespark on your gunpowder?" she asked.

"If you think it's so clever an idea, try it!"

"Not today, thanks. It'd be a bit rude. Look, I'm really not a robber," she repeated.

"Doubtless a wise and courteous choice. Also, as you may have noticed, igniting the powder in my pistol will put a round in the general vicinity of your head."

"While the firepowder in your belt does what to your hinder parts?"

"There isn't any. Firepowder, I mean," he explained. "The pistol – my own devisement – uses an alchemical process to mix the firepowder at the instant the weapon is cocked. I carry on my person only firepowder's inert ingredients. Even now, you could only fire the powder in the pistol's chamber. I invite you to put my words to a test."

"Thanks. I'm still not a bandit. And I'm certainly not interested in proving I can duck and get an arrow off before you can pull a trigger. Actually, I was more interested in your horses. They're incredible. How can they stand

armor?" she asked curiously.

"My horses?" He showed mock-serious indignation. "Rollo, did you hear what he called you?" He looked back from the horse to Elaine. "Young man, as even a plough-boy should clearly be able to see, this" – he tapped the horse's head – "is no horse, it is a Largon's Sentient Automaton. Am I not correct, Rollo?"

"In part." The horse's voice was touched with aggravated boredom. "Oh most great and puissant knight."

"In part?" asked the rider. Elaine watched bemusedly. The man seemed to lose interest in her, as though his mount's opinions were of greater consequence than the world around him.

The horse's voice was a melodic alto. "First, in light of her sex, the person to whom you spoke ought properly to have been addressed 'young lady', not 'young man'. Second, there are two of us, so we are properly 'Largon's Sentient Automata', the plural, though the appellation is a misnomer, automata being machines which are sentient or self-aware as a consequence of fundamentally mechanical processes, while of course we are reincarnates, living souls voluntarily necromantically implanted in these devices for a given – albeit long – span of years."

"Yes, yes, I believe we've been over this before. Oh, pardon me." He looked back at Elaine as his mount's first correction sank in. "Young lady?" She nodded politely. There was no reason to deny the point, for all that it should not have been that obvious to the horse. "I should introduce myself. I am Sean Bannerman, knight-paladin to his Wisdom, the Archpatriarch Gowophilus VII All-Seeing." A smile gleamed from behind his teeth.

"I, my name is Elaine, traveller, and sometime sell-sword." She smiled back. The last word for her profession had discouraged more than one ironplated oaf from making unwelcome advances. "And you are a Gowist – Paladin?"

"I suppose some people find my vocation surprising. But I have taken vows of humility, of love of knowledge, of faithful hoarding; my Patriarch promised me that by being a Paladin I can protect my collections more rigorously. Though to honor the faith, and not rout at the first hint of danger, is so frightfully hard. One's trying to do two contradictory things in the same moment. Indeed, without Rollo's advice..." he shrugged his shoulders.

"Without my advice, you would still be one of the Elect, and as virtuously unworldly as you are now," the horse interrupted. "Aren't you going to finish determining whether or not she is the dangerous band of brigands lurking in this forest?"

"You mean you don't already know? Does she have a

guilty mind?" Sean asked.

The horse's ears swivelled repeatedly through complete circles. "As I reported some considerable time ago, she is opaque to spells of detection. Only her physical presence is apparent. However, her lack of collaborators suggests that she is not a *band* of brigands, while her armor is in her pack, hardly a plausible place if she were planning to enter battle against you."

"Well, I asked her if she was a bandit, and she denied it, didn't she?" Knight-Paladin Bannerman peered back at Elaine. "Isn't that enough? Besides, you're hardly a whole band of thieves, not all by yourself. In fact, you're rather lucky to have met me, because this road is too dangerous for a girl like you." Sean ostentatiously uncocked his pistol and returned it to his belt, giving no sign that he had initially assumed Elaine to be a boy. "Especially a girl foolish enough not to wear what little armor she has. Why, just last night, not three leagues from here, an Imperial Baron was set upon by three dozen cut-throats, and barely escaped alive after killing half of them, including their leader, a dastardly vixen with blond-brown hair, sea green eyes, and the depraved habit of sneaking into groups of travellers by disguising herself as a runaway ploughboy." Sean paused in his discourse. Certain implications of his final words slowly penetrated to his mind.

"Walking all day in armor, even in this weather, may be tolerable, but no way to get places quickly." She giggled. "Do I look like a Baron's killed me recently?" The Automaton — Automata? did they both speak? — was remarkable. What sort of soul, in what previous life, had gained its speaking habits? Among Gowists, she considered, nothing was too surprising.

"I suppose not. But bandits are dangerous. They captured two mail coaches last week, and have destroyed the taverns for several days' travel ahead," Sean reported.

And would view you as choice prey, considered Elaine, assuming they don't look too hard at the horses. She asked herself if she wanted to find a polite way to make Sean go away. Travelling in his company might not be the safest choice imaginable. A bandit would likely ignore her; equally surely, a bandit would view him as a target.

"If we're going the same way, I suppose I could offer you a ride on Orlo." He gestured at his putative packhorse. Elaine pondered. There was, alas, an excellent chance that her aura would work its way progressively into its mechanisms, with unfortunate consequences for poor Orlo.

"Maybe, maybe I'd better not," she answered

"Bandits have insight into the aspects of the Holy, since they are mostly all terrible cowards who strike from be-

hind. Thus, you're doubtless safer walking some paces in front of me," he noted gravely.

She tried to suppress a snicker at Gowist logic, as applied to protecting one's travelling companions. A religion which extolled cowardice as a prime virtue had no business inciting its believers to become knight-crusaders for the faith. "Are there bandits soon?"

"Likely within a league or less," he answered.

"Perhaps I'd best slip into my armor. If you'll excuse me?" She stepped backwards into the woods. If he went away while she was dressing, that would be fine with her. She didn't want him to think that she was changing her mind about the wisdom of wearing armor, or that she had been wrong in the first place, but positive knowledge of bandits put a different light on things. Besides, if she didn't wear armor she might start to get soft, perhaps even as soft as Grandoon.

"Would you prefer my tent?" he began. She took several more quick steps backwards, almost sprawling over a tree root. Did she want to walk with him or not? A group desperate enough to attack a mail coach — a fortress to which wheels had incidentally become attached — might be desperate enough to attack lonely, clearly penniless, travellers. Having him along wouldn't really hurt. Her chances of spotting the ambush would be as good as ever, if there were an ambush. He did seem to be heavily armed, too. On the other hand, he was absolutely sure to be attacked by any bandits he encountered. Skirting the road for a few leagues would not be easy; the woods were recent growth, still thickly undergrown with dense brush.

Was Sean a real Paladin of Gow? It was a strange vocation in that religion. Of course, the temple acolytes of Hrrdis, Minx Goddess of the Lepatoa, had a cult within which virginity was a mandatory attribute. He might be a bandit, placed to lure her into a trap. His aside about protecting his collection rang true, though. What sort of bandit would need to lure single people on foot, like her, into a trap?

She emerged from the woods. Sean and his steeds were deep in conversation. The two automata had noted her well before he did. She decided she could be grateful that Largon had not made automata by the boatload. More than once, sneaking through a picket line had saved her skin. The beasts were obviously far more perceptive than human sentries, most of whom relied on magic enhancements to detect their enemies.

Sean's glance took in her lightened pack, then searched for changes in her dress. Her cloak and cape flowed loosely enough that the armor was practically invisible, except for a gleam of steel near her throat. "We've been using one of my crystal balls on the road ahead," he announced.

"About two miles further on a dozen or more men - from their body heat - lurk in the woods."

"It would," noted Rollo, "be a rational location for an ambush, at least against those with steeds which lack my, shall we say, fleetness of foot."

"He's good?" asked Elaine.

"Oh, yes, faster than any horse, even with four men on his back. Aren't you, Rollo?" The automaton ignored Sean. Elaine had no trouble getting ahead of them all to set the pace. She tried to talk, discovering that Sean Bannerman, for all that he was a knight-paladin, was remarkably timid about maintaining a conversation. He didn't suspect that she might be a bandit, or worry that he should be circumspect in his words. He obviously thought that his magic weapons would protect him. The more he casually referred to his armamentarium, the more Elaine suspected that he might even be right. Sean was, however, naturally shy.

"So, what do you collect?" Elaine knew that question would start a Gowist talking.

"Largely I amass books, though I also have some unusual weapons, a few of which I brought with me, like this repeating hand cannon."

"Repeating?"

"Yes, so long as I pull the trigger, it will fire three shots each second, until its supply of darts is exhausted. Mostly I collect books."

"Books?" Except for the hand cannon, which she had to respect, his weapons were all thaumaturgic gadgets which she could neither use nor fear. She hoped his unusual hand cannon stayed unusual. The battlefield was already deadly enough, even for people like her who could shrug off battle magic.

"Yes, books. On astronomy, and the motions of the planets, and sky creatures," he said.

"Sky creatures? Birds? Dragons?" she asked.

"Oh, no, I have an uncle who collects birds. He has, trapped on enchanted scrolls, the sound of the calls of every sort of bird that perished with lost Megrez, vanished under the waves these two thousand years. No, I limit myself to creatures from beyond the moon - beyond the crystal spheres of Tegel-La and Tegel-Sorin, if you believe Tegel-Sorin's crystal sphere is still there," he said.

"I'm not sure I believe in spheres. There is another system, after all. There are animals from beyond the lunar spheres?" she asked.

"Not many. The best single book is still *De Libris Celestovoris*, though the *Celestial Bestiary* of Omar is better

known, even if it is a thousand years old. Omar treats both real animals and mythical ones, and tells them apart. For example, the Lyre-Spider - it weaves Lyran spider-silk, which cannot be cut save with diamond knives - came from the Evenstar, brought to Earth by a comet. Though the Chronicles of Ju'o make the comet sound more like a mechanical contrivance, a magical device, than a hairy star," he said.

"An enchanted skyship? Made in Ju'o? During the Second cycle? They could hardly even enchant armor back then," she objected.

"The comet," intruded Rollo, "is explicitly described as coming from the Evenstar, using the particulate possessive case, showing that the ship came from the Evenstar herself, as opposed to first appearing in the constellation in which the Evenstar momentarily lay. The Chronicles of Ju'o further say that the Emperor of Ju'o himself received in his court beings from the comet. The declensions imply that the beings were received as mortals, not as some sort of demiurge."

"There are other beings," continued Sean, "recent interest being focussed on creatures - the yeti - alleged to have descended from the Nightstar, and cloudships of similar provenance, shattered by the dragons for disturbing their sky paintings. Perhaps the strangest creature, and from Omar the most terrible, is the Vissorant, the living death incarnate in a star. Omar's source viewed the Vissorant as more dangerous than all else which lives, here or in the hereafter. Omar says that its ascendancy in the heavens is the doom of the world, since no man, no pride of mages or flight of dragons, can hope to stand against it. Fortunately, though he is a trifle obscure on this point, the creature's path 'circles ever through foreign skies, swims forever in foreign seas', so long 'the portal which is not a portal' remains closed."

"Just as well," answered Elaine. Were any of Sean's tales reliable? The Chronicles of Ju'o were usually reliable. Certainly the Lyre-Spider, for all that it ate only dew, sunbeams, and watermelon, was entirely poisonous to normal creatures, and quite resistant to spells of death-summoning, save those especially crafted against it.

"I find it terribly sad," said Sean. "Here is this fabulous animal, the Vissorant, and there is no way that I can ever capture its true image for my collection. I also collect books about earthly animals, though I am not nearly so good at that. In fact, my books have scarcely filled a single room, and I have but a modest fraction of all those ever penned on the topic."

"Sean," remarked Rollo, "in accord with the sacred tenets of our most noble, perfect, and glorious Faith, and to impress the lady with your moral worth, you might at least observe in passing that the room in question was previously used, by the Grand Duke of All Pleven, as his

chief public audience chamber."

"Details, details. Even being generous, I scarcely have more than ten or thirty thousand volumes."

Elaine nodded politely. Only a Gowist, and a fabulously wealthy one, would have a private library like that. Grandoon's five hundred works on sorcery was by most standards a very large number of books.

"I see," she said. "That's really a lot. Have you read them all yet?"

"Me? Read them? Oh, no, I don't read all the books — no time. I'm a collector. In fact, I have several friends, lay members of the faith, who I retain to read new acquisitions, looking for missing pages. Sometimes I can only get copies of those, which is really disappointing."

"I'm sure, I'm sure. Were you in the siege to collect books, too?" she asked.

"Well, no. Actually, the Patriarch sent me to the far north to protect the Faith's lands. I had half-expected that I would be involved in the siege, but I was lucky. It was over by the time I arrived. Wasn't it strange how the siege ended, though?"

"Strange?" The hairs on the nape of her neck rose. What was he about to say? She tried to tell herself she didn't already know, but her intuition gave her the outline before he spoke.

"They say the spell dampers failed at the North Gate. Not that I saw it myself, but I had a good friend in the attack, who saw what happened."

"What did happen? You hear stories, but your friend was closer than any of whom I heard."

"Well, Vulf Vulfson was in the first party through the gates when they went down. He was supposed to fight his way through the tower to the spell dampers, to keep them from being fixed. Some of them had failed, enough so there was a gap at the gates, but the mages outside the tower thought it was only temporary, so anyone who went in would find themselves trapped when the dampers were restored. Vulf's party had a fine time of it, with flame walls all over the place inside the tower, but when they reached the dampers they had nothing to do."

"Why not?"

"The dampers had blown up — shattered under the strain. Vulf found a room full of dead men, bodies shredded by an explosion, the dampers in ruins."

"Why did they fail? Spell dampers are supposed to work right all the time, That's how most cities protect themselves from bandits and adventurers. If they weren't reliable, it would be terrible."

"No explanation. That mage from the Academy, Grandoon, was all over the place questioning people. Some say he wrecked the dampers himself with a secret cantrip, known only to the Academy, to put down the revolt. Others say there was treachery within, persons loyal to the Duke sabotaging the dampers."

It always happens this way, she thought. As soon as she left a place, her name, her face, even the very idea of her existence began to change, finally to pass out of all recognition. Why did the whole world hate her so? Surely Grandoon's aura tales, if she'd not dreamed the telling, were too simple, too weak explain the world's absolute hatred of her presence, of any mention of her existence, a hatred far more virulent than that between Pyrrin and his sworn enemies. For a time she was happy that Sean was behind her, unable to see the look on her face. She pretended to mop sweat from her brow, incidentally squeezing back a pair of tears.

"Is Grandoon still in town?" she asked.

"No, he flew away. Mages do, you know. Fly, that is. He was living by himself, north of the Tressin, and then he was gone."

"By himself? No bodyguard? No one at all?"

"Why, yes, alone. Earl Yoog himself told me. But archmages don't need bodyguards. The Earl visited Grandoon, the day before Grandoon left, to give away a cursed sword. He hoped, rightly, that Grandoon could take the sword and not leave the curse behind. No, the Earl said specifically that it was the first time he'd ever spoken with a real Archmage." Sean hesitated. "Oh, I know what you meant. I forgot, women do tend to be more interested in that sort of gossip. That was the famous Grandoon, the world's greatest lover — or so's said — but all by himself. If you believe inn-minstrel's tales, he has as a lady friend an archimaga, back at the Academy. So don't think of trying to steal him away, should you ever meet him, or you'll end up turned into a frog by his light o'love."

Elaine was quickly glad that Sean marched behind her. A slight turn of her head hid her face from Sean and his machines, as if she were thinking about something. Her rigid stare, writ on mage's face, would have been chill enough to freeze a cataract in its fall. She had been away from Arburg for no more than a few days, and already she had faded from people's memories. That was the way people really were. They couldn't stand to have someone else help them, especially someone they hated. People had to believe they saved themselves. If need be, they'd protect their own self-importance by denying she even existed. It wasn't a new feeling; it had happened too many times before. The pain was as sharp as when she'd first experienced it, what seemed centuries ago. Silence came to her. She didn't want to say anything; Sean was

too timid to push a conversation forward by himself.

"Of course," Sean finally began talking again, "Having missed one siege, I must go to another. The Patriarch bids me north, over the Ocean, to the Muabbin River. There, between the Taurine and Daurine Mountains, lies the city of Haigalras, revealed by Divine insight to be threatened by Pyrrin's satraps."

"The city's important?"

"Who holds that city and its fleet controls all practical crossings of the Muabbin for a hundred miles. West of the city, Pyrrin's satraps face only petty earldoms and city states until they reach the Lyssan Empire, a hundred leagues beyond. Pyrrin sees the Muabbin Valley as a ripe fruit, waiting for the picking. Along the way to the harvest, he will doubtless slay any Adherents, plunder their Collections, and desecrate the Temples of the Faith. So I ride for battle."

"I suppose your Patriarch didn't mention a minor obstacle protecting Haigalras — the passes of the Chakrosh?" She wondered how Pyrrin had managed to force them, and how he thought he'd supply an army across them. "Of course," she continued, "If they could cross the Daurine mountains, the princedoms of the valley would be delighted to treat Pyrrin's lands the same way. All those cities of Pyrrin's, just waiting to be looted, safe only because the Daurines are impassible. Oh, warriors and mages! Sometimes I'm sick of them! Why can't Pyrrin and his foes leave the world to do its business in peace?"

"For a sell-sword, that's a strange thought. Were there not perpetual war, you'd be out of work. Besides, there is a pass through the Daurines."

"A pass? No! There isn't even a smuggler's route. Even the Sky Pirates detour six hundred miles."

"Still, there is one pass, large enough for a great army, though blocked by a force 'seen not by mage's eye, explained not by Gow's words, fearing not the Four Gods.'"

"Where's you hear that one?"

"Several places, all obscure, all recently come upon by me — and some in places even reliable. The chronicles," he paused self-importantly, "the Chronicles of Daifur note an Emperor who sent an army into that pass, on Gow's assurance that cold steel and sorcery's fire were enough for victory. The army vanished, archers, pikemen, elephants, and mages, in a single night. In Reven, the Grand Temple of the Four Gods keeps a cult map, showing the pass, labelled as a place to which their Gods' powers do not reach. In The Book of Heroic Deeds, the Mayevin Emperor Harrek is said to have gone there himself and bargained with its power — to what end was not recorded."

Elaine's skin crawled. Daifur had passed from the world a millenium ago, its histories now mixed with fable. A cult map, still held by its own priests, was hardly likely to mention weaknesses which did not exist. And Harrek? The Book of Heroic Deeds was so sodden with exaggerations of imperial virtue that she had never been able to wade through it. Still, the Cult Map was a reliable clue; Sean's tale would need be tracked down. An army across the Daurines would be a stiletto thrust into the heart of Pyrrin's dominions. She hoped Sean hadn't noticed her response to Harrek's name. She didn't want anything strange to happen to him; so far he had actually been nice to her. The patter of bootheels led her deeper into her own memories.

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[illegible]

The latest word on Greg Stafford's *The Book of Emperors* is that it will become available through Wizard's Attic in January 1995; about the time that RuneQuest Con 2 will occur.

Charlie Krank of Chaosium has released the following product information:

Gloranthan Legend and Lore

[#4501, \$10.95] GLORANTHAN SOURCEBOOK -- Wyrms' Footprints collects long-lost lore about the world of Glorantha culled from many sources. Some pieces once appeared many years ago in Wyrms' Footnotes, a magazine that we used to publish. Others are gems garnered from Greg Stafford's voluminous files and early writings. Much that is here is new, never having seen the light of day before.

Scheduled release date of March 1995
from Chaosium.

Adventures Unlimited is a new magazine set to release its premier issue in December of this year. The cover price is \$4.95, but subscribers get \$1 off for however many issues they wish to subscribe, and *Adventures Unlimited* will cover postage. This magazine will feature adventures for many varied game systems. The second issue will probably contain a *RuneQuest* adventure. Contact *Adventures Unlimited* at:

or e-mail at <nikchick@aol.com>

Joe Scott is no longer the RuneQuest Guy at Avalon Hill. There is no word on his replacement.

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This is not John Galt.

Comments On *Interregnum* #7

Peter Maranci

2 The following is quoted from the 'Publications of Possible Interest to A&E Readers' page in the November issue of *Alarums & Excursions* (issue #231):

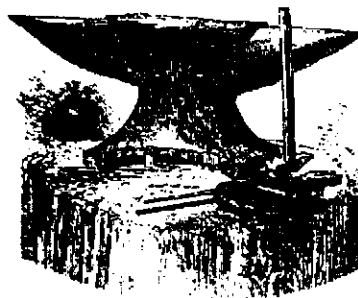
INTERREGNUM, monthly APA, ed. Peter Maranci, 81 Washington St. #2, Malden, MA 02148. \$1 plus postage per issue -- or sample copy for \$3 US, \$4 foreign/overseas. Contributions: \$1/master page or 200 copies PLUS postage. Thick and professionally photocopied, about a dozen contributors.

End of quoted material.

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2 re the monkey called M: TG: I can stop
any time I want...really.

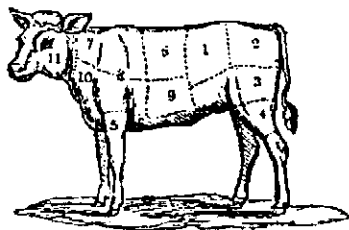
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Save my car: Fortunately, I was not seriously injured; another reason to buy a Saturn automobile.

Colophon: Produced on my friendly Macintosh Quadra 660AV (20/240) (AKA ~~Quadrant~~) using Microsoft Word 5.1. Graphics courtesy of New Heights, 10483 South Amaryllis, Sandy, UT 84094. Printed on my rusty HP DeskWriter. Photocopied and collated for inclusion in *Interregnum* #8 by Peter Maranci.

re "Scooby Doo" gambit: Good one.



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I have been thinking about how to do this for some time, now. I have finally began putting my fingers to the keyboard to come up with a product. I plan on having it completed by the time RQ Con 2 happens here in California (January, 1995).

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SoloQuest

The Myths of Orlanth

The Introduction

You are an Initiate of the Air god Orlanth and of Ernalda the Earth Mother. You and your wife, Myella, have lived in the Zola Fel River Valley for four years, now. You both came seeking a new beginning by farming the river valley in the ways of Orlanth and Ernalda and now live in your own stead. The Duke (the local lord put into place by the Imperial Lunar Government) and his mercenaries have provided protection and stability to the area; you and the other farmers have provided food and income to the area.

Myella is twelve weeks pregnant with your child...you both have tried before to conceive a child, but it was not in Ernalda's scheme of things to be until now. A Divination performed last season confirmed that she is pregnant with a healthy child. This is good, for this will finally allow Myella to become a Priestess of Ernalda, something that this area can put to good use.

You are on your way to the shores of the Zola Fel River. A newtling reed boat from up river was damaged, and the newtlings wanted a guard while the repairs were performed.

The Player Character

This adventure is designed to be used with an Orlanth initiate due to mythic encounters. In a pinch, any air cultist would work, though.

You have three options to choose from in deciding which character to use: 1) Generate your own using RQ 3 rules; 2) Use a PC of your own; or 3) use the character provided.

To Start

When you are ready to begin, go to entry number one.

6 S W Nodar Tanskin O X

Initiate of Orlanth and Ernalda
Farmer/Ex-Adventurer

STR	16	Move	3
CON	18	HP	17
SIZ	15	FP	34-17 = 17
INT	12	MP	16+7 crystal = 23
POW	16	Ringmail armor:	
DEX	12	01-04 r leg	5/6
APP	13	05-08 l leg	5/6
		09-11 abdom	5/6
		12 chest	5/7
		13-15 r arm	5/5
		16-18 l arm	5/5
		19-20 head	5/6

Weapons	SR	A/P	Damage	Pts
1H Bast. Sword	7	70/49	1d10+1+1d4	12
1H Spear	7	61/32	1d6+1+1d4	8
Javelin	3	76/-	1d10+1d2	8
Target Shield	8	74/30	1d6+1d4	12

Spirit Magic(72%): Bladesharp 4, Heal 4, Disrupt, Strength 1, Shimmer 2.

Divine Magic(92%)(one use only):
Worship Orlanth, Wind Words, Shield 2, Enchant Iron.

Skills: Climb 62, Dodge 43, Jump 76, Throw 45, Bargaining 45, Fast Talk 35, Oratory 67, Speak Praxian 35, Speak Sartarite 60, Speak Stormspeech 54, Speak Tradetalk 30, Animal Lore 49, First Aid 30, Mineral Lore 53, Plant Lore 45, World Lore 15, Play Flute 39, Listen 67, Scan 82, Search, 52, Track 45, Hide 75, Sneak 30.

Magic Items: 7-pt MP storing crystal in ring on left hand.

Treasure: Silver bracelet worth 200 Lunars. 15 Lunars and 4 clacks in coin.

1 As you approach the Zola Fel River, you hear the newtlings engaging in small talk among themselves.

Newtlings are usually very shy and quiet around humans, for they are often hunted by humans for their tails. Some humans consider newtling tail a delicacy. You don't. Newtlings are excellent swimmers.

You come upon two of the reed boats that the newtlings frequently pilot on the river and four newtlings that are calf deep in a slow part of the river. The newtlings are gathering reeds near the shore. The newtlings wear no armor and have only a harness, nets, and daggers on their bodies.

If you approach them in a friendly and non-hostile manner, go to 17.

If you approach them with a neutral attitude, go to 6.

If you have obvious hostile intent towards them as you approach, go to 18.

If you quietly sneak into cover and try to hide while listening to them talk among themselves without revealing yourself, go to 3.

2 The newtlings yell curses at you as you flee from the snail. You are surely not a true warrior of Orlanth. You will be lucky if the impests do not afflict you! Go back to the beginning of this adventure with a different character (someone not afraid of chaos).

3 Due to the light brush and waist high grasses, add 10% to your Hide and subtract 10% from your Sneak. Also, subtract 1% from your Sneak for every point of armor and weapon ENC you have. Make only one roll to see if you succeed at both your Sneak and Hide.

If you fail either, go to 6.

If you are successfully hiding and sneaking, go to 13.

4 After a couple of hours of work, the newtlings take a break for lunch. They sit by themselves near the shore of the river, eating snails and fish they have brought with them. They seem wary of you and always keep their eyes upon you. They do not talk to you and seem to distrust you.

If you attempt to be friendly and try to talk nicely to them, go to 10.

Otherwise, go to 14.

5 There is a sudden surge in the water as a monstrous and deformed snail surges out of the river towards the newtlings...a dragon snail is attacking! It is bigger than an ox! Three of the newtlings flee in terror. Belly-Bright casts Protection 3 on you and submerges into the river...he is no fighter. You know your duty...when chaos is near you are obligated to destroy it!

Go to 9 to remove this curse of existence from the river valley.

6 The newtlings are startled at your appearance. After a few preliminaries, one newtling identifies himself as Belly-Bright, in the service of the Duke. He and his companions are transporting seeds from the Red Cliff Domain down river to Ronegarth. They remain on guard while you are present, with one newtling always watching you while the others work on gathering reeds and repairing the damaged boat.

Go to 4.

7 The newtlings invite you to eat lunch with them. Not wanting to insult their hospitality, you partake of snail and fish. They keep you entertained with stories of their travels from the home waters of the Great Old Newtling in central Sartar to this river valley.

Go to 5.

8 This is your lucky day! You notice at that soon after you wound this beast that some slime erupts from the wound and apparently starts to heal the wound! This monster has the following Chaotic Feature: regenerates one hit point per melee round in a random injured location on Strike Rank 10 until dead. Please make the appropriate modifications to its damage at the end of each melee round.
Go to 9 to finish the combat.

9 This beast has a row of large and rugged spikes across the top of its twisted shell. The dragon snail seems interested in eating the newtlings reed boats and their contents.
You may stand your ground and keep the dragon snail from getting to the reed boats and the seeds that they contain. You have one round to make preparations for combat prior to the attack of the beast.
The first time that you damage this foul slime, go to 8.
Note that the dragon snail only has a movement of 1.
If you stand off and fire missile weapons at or used ranged magic against the mutant snail go to 22.
If you run away from this dragon snail without fighting it, go to 2.
If the dragon snail defeats you, go to 11.
If you defeat the dragon snail, go to 21.

W V Dragon Snail V W

STR 27 Move 1
CON 18 HP 20
SIZ 22 FP 45
INT 02 MP 10
POW 10
DEX 07
APP --

location	melee & missile	hp
shell	01-08	16/9
body	09-14	4/9
head	15/20	4/9

Weap	SR	A/P	Dam	pts
Bite	7	53/--	1d6+2d6	--

10 Try either your Fast Talk roll or your Oratory roll...one or the other.
If you succeed, go to 20.
If you fail, go to 14.

11 Yummy! More protein for chaos. Better luck next time. The end.

12 There is a sudden surge in the water as a monstrous and deformed snail surges out of the river towards the newtlings...a dragon snail is attacking! It is bigger than an ox! The newtlings flee to the river in terror. They are not fighters...you hardly expect less of them. You know your duty...when chaos is near you are obligated to destroy it!
Go to 9 to remove this curse of existence from the river valley.

13 You can see that all four of the newtlings have the Duke's markings on their harnesses.
You can hear the newtlings talking among themselves. They are fearful of being alone and unable to move the Duke's seeds. They do not know what caused the reed boat to be damaged, but are glad that they did not lose the Duke's cargo. They seem to be meek except for their leader, Belly-Bright, who keeps the others working and bolsters their morale.
Go to 15.

14 The newtlings start to repair their boat again. One newtling keeps his eyes on you at all times...you obviously cannot be trusted.
Go to 12.

15 If you approach the newtlings in a friendly and non-hostile manner, go to 17.
If you approach them with a neutral attitude, go to 6.
If you have obvious hostile intent towards them as you approach, go to 18.

16 Frog Woman is a water spirit who survived the destruction during the Great Darkness by staying one leap ahead of her foes. She is found only here, in the Wastelands. She is a benevolent being, a relic of happier days. Since the Dawn of Time, she has been worshipped by many shaman and their followers for her ability to transport them great distances through the air. She is a particular favorite of newtlings.

Frog Woman demands of her devotees only that they butcher frogs and other amphibians using the spell of Peaceful Cut.

Your help will be relayed to Frog Woman with the prayers of the newtlings.

Go to 19.

17 At first they are startled at your appearance, but are soon calmed by your friendly manner. After a few preliminaries, one newtling identifies himself as Belly-Bright, in the service of the Duke. He and his companions are transporting seeds from the Red Cliff Domain down river to Ronegarth.

Go to 20.

18 The frightened newtlings run from you and dive into the river. Before they are gone from sight, you see that they have the Duke's marking on their harnesses. You see that they have seeds in their reed boat, and one of the boats is damaged. The bags carrying the seeds also have the Duke's markings. The newtlings do not come back to the boats while you are present. The adventure is over.

19 The newtlings redouble their efforts to repair their craft and have soon departed. They leave in a joyous mood due to the knowledge that they have a new friend among the humans.

Go to 23.

20 Belly-Bright explains that one of their reed boats was damaged just upriver by something in the river, a submerged tree or a rock. They did not stop to investigate the cause because they were busy trying to keep the boat afloat and to get to the shallows here.

The newtlings are grateful that you are friendly and helping them, for they are frequently subjected to harassment.

Go to 7.

21 The newtlings praise you for your combat abilities. You are surely a great warrior! The newtlings heap much praise upon you. The newtlings will heal up to eight points of damage you may have sustained in the combat with their spirit magic spells. They bestow you with gifts of the river...a shell necklace, a sack of tasty dried fish, fresh snails, and the blessings of their god...Frog Woman.

If you wish to hear more of Frog Woman, go to 16.

Otherwise, go to 19.

22 As the dragon snail eats the newtlings reed boats and the seeds for the Duke, the newtlings fling curses at you. The dragon snail departs after 3 melee rounds and the newtlings depart at the same time. They are very upset. You return to your stead to face the wrath of the Duke. The end.

23 Congratulations on a job well done. You surely have the breathe of Orlanth. You head on back to your stead to fresh meal and the companionship of your spouse; you can tell her of the great deeds that you have performed this day. The end, until next month.

December brings the next installation of *SoloQuest...The Myths of Orlanth...Is Myella safe? Were those the tracks of a MOB of broos that you saw? If it was, can you defeat them all? Are you ready to trek across the Pains of Prax to rescue your loved one? Bring only your courage and a sharp sword to the next issue of Interregnum.*

THE EIGHT TRACK MIND #VIII

Ramblings on RPGs, SF, and Misc.

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November in an American election year. The time when we US residents get to determine at least a portion of our fate for the next two years. Given my personal choice I'd rather that the United States of America had a Parliamentary system in which we chose a whole government instead of our present system where we vote for our Congress people and President separately and hope that between Congress and the President a passable government can be worked out. We often end up with a divided government in which blame gets passed from one branch to another. Congresspeople end up in office in perpetuity as they can often avoid blame for government's failings. With a Parliamentary system, every Congressperson would also be judged as a member of their party particularly if they are in the party in power. More responsibility, more accountability.

Enough of the political sermon that has little to do with the normal topics (except that an American Parliamentary government is sort of SF); on to the Official Topic:

HAIKU

Clowns are raining down.

*Hear the scream of the grease paint;
danger! Clown puddles.*

—Tom Servo on MST3K



That's from memory; I may have some words wrong. Uhhh, ummm, unfortunately most of my experience with haiku was in elementary school in Hot Springs, South Dakota with a somewhat odd teacher. On to one of the alternate topics:

POETRY IN RPG

Ahh, much better. How do we use poetry in our campaigns? Here's some ideas.

Poetry And Song: The Bard

I would guess that in most fantasy campaigns and even some other genres there will somewhere be a bard or minstrel or a close equivalent. They are a standard element of fantasy fiction and of gaming at least back to AD&D's super powerful bards in the original version. The bard sings the standard folk songs of his culture of course, but he also carries news and sometimes even inspires action against a great threat or evil.

Ideally, a bard in a campaign will be a wondrous poet and beautiful singer. In practice, we often have to fake it unless we have such gifts in real life. For Live Action Role Playing it is not likely to be able to fake it, though in one game we were treated to the sounds of the great Eastern Bard Sanyo (think about it). But in table top games we can use descriptions of the reactions of the NPC's or what feelings are invoked in the players. We can also dig up appropriate poems from books and under some circumstances use recorded music as the song of the Bard.

The Poems of Ritual

Foul Slime, Curse of existence,
begone! Turn your back and Flee from Me. I
will kill you, you are evil. Lie and whimper
before me.

Orlathi challenge of things of Chaos from
Cults of Prax.

The above is an example of a ritual poem that Orlanthi Wind Lords are required to use. Religions, orders, and other organizations are likely to use such poetry as prayers, challenges, oaths, or other ritual purposes. This can add a bit of flavor to a campaign and even some depth as PCs and NPCs do more than just state that they've made a challenge or performed a ritual. And the poetry doesn't necessarily have to be all that good; it just needs to fit the occasion.

Poetic Spells

Charlie Sheen, Ben Varen, Shrink to the size of a lima bean!

Spell from an episode of "Pinky and the Brain".

Spells in fiction frequently are poetic, or at least rhyme. Look at any episode of *Bewitched*. :) GURPS Magic even has rules for cantrips or "Poetic Magic" in which the result of the spell is determined by the content of the poem. Another way of adding flavor to a campaign but it also requires a lot of thought; players are likely to analyze any spell an NPC casts and try to determine the logic behind it.

Final Thoughts

There's of course loads of other uses for poetry in RPG, this has been a light sampling of potential uses.

TWERPS! The World's Easiest Role Playing System

Reindeer Games

Published by Gamescience 1512 30th Avenue Gulfport, MS 39501

Here's a system that doesn't cost \$25 or more for the basic book and another \$18 or more for supplements. The basic rules and the supplements cost around \$3 each. Of course we're not getting a big book for this price, we're getting a booklet, a ten sided die, and other variable stuff like maps, character sheets, and other play aids in every supplement. Is it worth \$3? Well, let's see.

The system is indeed pretty darned simple. You role a tensider and check a table to get a starting

Strength of 3 to 7. There are no other stats; success roles and hit points are determined from Strength. A character can sacrifice a Strength point to acquire additional skills (PCs start can start with a free skill or profession) or if they are a Mage to acquire additional spells or spell levels during character creation. Additional Strength, skills, and spells are purchased with Victory Points (experience points) earned during play. I don't want to give too many details because I'd end up including the whole of the rules in this article. :)

There's been several expansions to Twerps in most genres. The only ones that I think they've missed are Espionage, Western and Smart Animals but I think that it is possible to create those from what's available. Here's the ones I have seen.

Fly By Knights

This is actually a campaign book detailing the Land of Demuria and featuring characters that ride flying creatures in service to Lords and Ladies.

Twerps Magic

Adds magic and mages. The system is actually rather similar to RuneQuest Divine Magic and can also be used for psionics in campaigns.

Kung Fu Dragons

This campaign book adds martial arts. It isn't a serious simulation; the skills are called "Fus" and include Sna Fu and Toe Fu. It also contains the world's smallest GM screen.

Space Cadets

This adds futuristic science fiction to the Twerps universe.

Rocket Rangers

The Twerps spaceship design and combat system; a companion to Space Cadets. Features spaceships plans.

Superdudes

This adds superpowers, of course.

Robo-Punks

This is sort of the cyberpunk expansion for Twerps.

M.E.C.H.-Tech

The universe of giant robot combat for Twerps.

Twisted Tales of Terror

A horror campaign set, featuring great Ragu-Lhu among other terrors.

Metaphysical Ninja Maniac Chainsaw Vitamin Junkies!

Uhhhh, this is sort of a post-holocaust campaign book in the spirit (kinda) of Mad Max and lesser films. Yes, Twerps is often not totally serious.

Twerps Tweek

A Twerps parody of Trek. Features characters and ships similar after a fashion to those we know and love.

How To Do Everything... Better!

This is a general expansion featuring a lot of additional goodies for almost every setting. Also has some errata.

But Can You Really Play It?

The truth is I've never ran or played in a Twerps game. Most (all?) of my associates react negatively to the system. About the only use I've made of my Twerps stuff was in a one night session where I used the RuneQuest system, a modified version of Demuria from Fly by Knights (mainly used the Demuria map), some Call of Cthulhu monsters, and the Story Path cards White Wolf used to produce. I've also used the world's smallest GM screen from Kung Fu Dragons.

I think it would be great fun for not very serious one session games. I'd modify it though. I'd give people eight or nine points that they could use to pick skills and set their starting strength. I'd figure that each level of a spell also includes one magic point that can be used to cast that spell or other spells, allowing for greater versatility in spellcasting. And I would likely use a chaotic universe setting where any sort of mix of characters could be in a party and people could bring in characters from another session with little more trouble than a dubious explanation of how they got from one place to the next. I'd be going for fun and maybe a little silliness; not profound and insightful deep role playing.

SHORT TAKES ON BOOKS

Most of my SF and Fantasy reading is in the various SF magazines; I rarely read full novels and these days I almost never buy a new book.

Paperbacks cost \$4 and more these days. So when I buy a book it is generally used. My reviews are therefore not exactly

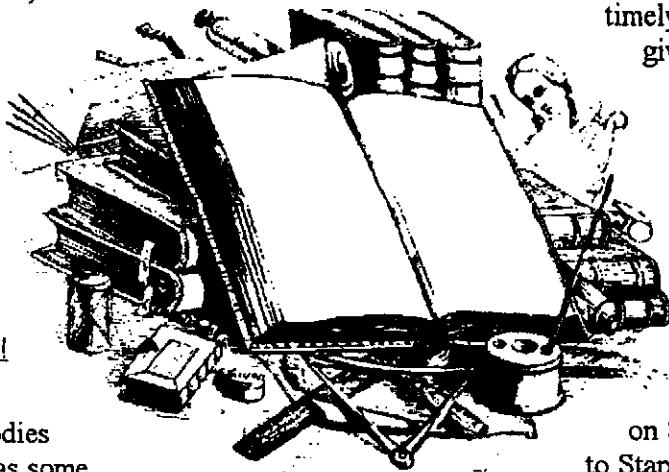
timely, but hopefully I can give some ideas on books to look for. Some may even have useful gaming ideas. These will be fairly short, hopefully.

Star Maker Olaf Stapledon First in published in 1937

In my readings on SF I've seen references to Stapledon's work as amongst the great world-spanning classics. This book isn't one of his more famous works, but it is quite an interesting work.

When outsiders criticize SF, they often refer to the lack of characterization. But in SF, the story and the ideas are the things; characterization is a good thing but not essential to SF. This novel is not a character study; heck, there's almost no dialogue at all. But it deals with the basic nature of all of intelligent life.

The story consists of a mental voyage by an Englishman and various other intelligent minds throughout space and time initially in search of intelligent life but ultimately in search of "The Star Maker"; God, essentially. And it covers galactic history from beginning to the end of Time, and before and past the existence of the Universe. Stapledon assumes that the majority of intelligent races are searching for the meaning of life, the universe, and everything and seeking God or His rough equivalent. The greatest races ultimately achieve a higher consciousness; a sort of racial mind and even beyond that to a Cosmic Mind. These great racial minds brought the Englishman and his alien companions out into the cosmos to learn of the universe.



What stands out for gamer purposes is Stapledon's descriptions of alien races. He assumes that most races will be at a core level "human"; understandable somewhat to each other. But physically and to an extent mentally they are vastly different. He describes near humanoids, plant creatures, starfish like creatures, spiderlike and fishlike creatures living in symbiosis, and so on. There are broad histories of the races from earliest barbarism to their ultimate demise. Interestingly, Earth's humans play almost no role in the history in the cosmos; passing away in an eyeblink compared to other races. Even if one doesn't like the overall story it has potential for inspiring very unusual races for SF and fantasy games.

Thieves' World Anthology series edited by Robert Lynn Asprin

This is a series of shared world anthologies in which a setting was created, the city of Sanctuary, and various authors were allowed to people it with various characters and use other writer's characters as long as they didn't kill another writer's character. In some ways it's a bit like a big RPG campaign with Mr. Asprin as the GM; well, that's stretching it a bit but the writer's essentially were running characters in a world created by Mr. Asprin with the assistance and ideas of various other writers.

The city of Sanctuary is sort of a backwater of the Rankan Empire, an up and coming nation that conquered the former rulers (to the extent Sanctuary can be ruled), the Kingdom of Ilsig. The Governor of Sanctuary, Prince Kadakithis (disrespectfully called Kitty Cat), is the half brother of the Rankan Emperor and was sent there in part to get him out of the way. Depending on one's view, he's either trying to impose Rankan tyranny or sincerely trying to bring law and order to a basically lawless city. The townsfolk deal as best they can.

There's magic in Sanctuary; professional mages, wizards dealing with curses on them, and sometimes even the workings of the gods as the Rankan pantheon attempts to establish primacy over the old Ilsig gods. The first book had very little active dealings by the gods, but the second book had obvious divine actions and conflicts between the gods. Most folk aren't don't use magic and even distrust and fear it.

And there's quite an underworld. Thieves, mercenaries, mages for hire, assassins, drug dealers and of course the ever necessary fence. It's a place where if you don't know what you're doing you'll end up dead. You may end up dead (or worse) anyway. A great place for a campaign.

In fact there was a Thieves World RPG adventure pack put out by Chaosium with information for playing in most of the system available at the time, even Traveller! In Traveller the assumption was that Thieves World was either a strange planet where for some reason magic works, a world fallen from a high tech state where the tech was like magic (Clarke's Law) with a little of it surviving, or a virtual reality (though the term hadn't been coined yet) computer game. There was also a Thieves World Companion produced. The city of Sanctuary became the city of Refuge in RQ Glorantha during playtesting at Chaosium. Unfortunately these products have been out of print for some time and I picked up them up used. The Thieves World boxed set I picked for \$1 at the Brattle Book Store in Boston and featured a book signed by Andrew Offut, one of the Thieves' World authors.

But one doesn't necessarily need the boxed set to use Sanctuary in in one form or another in a campaign. Thieves World is probably the fantasy setting most suited to adventure gaming that I've ever read and just cries out for a campaign. This is probably old news to some, but if one has yet to read the books pick one or more up and get some inspiration.

THE BEST OF THE RPG COMICS

From the early days of Dragon magazine and the old Space Gamer comics have been a part of Role Playing games. While some have been serious comics detailing epic adventures the best in my opinion have been the humorous comics; the ones showing the funny side of gaming or of game worlds. Here's my choice for the best in '94.

* 1. "Murphy's Rules" by Phil Morresy in Pyramid magazine.

This comic has been around ever since the original Space Gamer with various artists drawing

the strip. But in all its incarnations it's been a winner, pointing out the illogic and silliness of many gaming rules. And of course there's the occasional special themes like "Games That Should Not Be Played"; things like "Live Action Toon!".

* 2. "What's New?" by Phil Foglio in The Duelist.

Originally, "What's New? with Phil and Dixie" was in Dragon and parodied RPGs while perpetually threatening to cover "sex in D&D". It was gone for a long time when suddenly it was resurrected in The Duelist. Ah, but no longer did it parody RPGs, it was now all about Magic: The Gathering! While I suppose some folk will find that to be blasphemy, I think the new version is really pretty good and there's all sorts of humor to be had. I understand that there's a few overly serious Magic players who don't like the game being parodied so we know Foglio must be doing something right.

* 3. "Joe Genero! Adventures Of The Average Man" by J.A. Holmgren in Shadis magazine.

This comic is sort of in the spirit of "Murphy's Rules", but instead of just finding weird rules it takes an average guy with average stats and abilities and average rolls, takes a given activity and sees what Joe Genero can do in different systems. You'd be surprised just how much difference the system can make; for instance an average guy can only lift 100 lbs. in Vampire (note that this is a normal human, not a vampire) but can lift 440 lbs in Warhammer 40K. It also notes oddities of individual systems; in the "Joe Runs Away" strip it is noted that in Shadowrun if two Joes run into each other at top speed they have a 50% chance of dying from the impact. An interesting strip.

* 4. "Knights of the Dinner Table (TM)" by Jolly R. Blackburn in Shadis.

This is a rather different strip. It is about RPG players more than the game. Each strip is about an established gaming group and the little things that often happen during play. Yup, rules arguments,

accusations of backstabbing by player's characters, over-reactions to PC problems, all those little things that make life fun. There's also a comic book available in some game or comics stores or directly from Shadis for \$2.95.



BITS AND PIECES

GURPS Mage is out in the stores now; apparently White Wolf finally allowed Steve Jackson Games to produce it. According to the latest Pyramid magazine White Wolf wants to renegotiate the licensing agreement so this may be the last GURPS version of a White Wolf product.

Whit Publications is producing a "no-frills game line" called Quick-Its. These will be 32 page RPG costing \$4.95. They will all have a common system and will concentrate on rules and suchlike leaving world creation up to individual GMs. Now most RPGs produced in the last several years have primarily pushed their grand settings more than whatever qualities their rules might possess. We have rulebooks that are mostly worldbooks. Quick-Its seems to be oriented towards the GM that wants to create their own universe and also towards folk who are recoiling in horror at the prospect of paying \$25, \$30, or even more for a basic rulebook. I've seen just a flyer; I'll pick up the product and review it at some point in the future. But for \$4.95 you're not losing much even if the product really stinks.

There's a new RPG out from Black Gate Publishing called Legacy. War of Ages. Apparently it involves these immortal folks running around with swords and after everything is said and done there will be only one left. Uhhh, that sounds kinda familiar, doesn't it? I hear that they couldn't afford the rights to produce an official Highlander RPG so they essentially produced it anyway and don't call it Highlander.

Ever have the problem of PCs wanting to go off in all different directions? Or ever see PCs

wondering just why on Earth they are together in the first place? Well, the new game from the folks at Marquee Press called *Khaotic* takes care of that problem. The party of PCs is all in one grotesque body and are placed there by outside forces to fight in a violent world. Looks quite insane.

If you ever watch Saturday morning cartoons, watch *The Tick* on Fox. This is probably the best superhero cartoon ever on TV; in large part because while it is funny, it also plays it straight. None of this business of the characters acting like they know it's just a cartoon; they take it all seriously even if they're fighting a giant mass of super expanding bread or a guy with a chair for a head (Chairface Chippendale). I also notice that they actually pay attention to continuity; in one episode the evil Chairface started to write his name on the Moon with a super laser before he was stopped. He got as far as CHA. In a recent episode, when the evil child villain was drawing the Moon closer to the Earth you could see the CHA on the Moon's face. This may seem trivial, but it shows they're paying attention and care a bit about consistency.

Rumor (maybe more than rumor?) has it that Chaosium is working on a new Gloranthan RPG that will use a system similar to *Pendragon*; I suppose it'll look a little like David Dunham's "Pendragon Pass". It may be ready by RQ Con II. This pretty much puts the last nail in the coffin of RuneQuest; I see little reason for Avalon Hill to put out a new version of RQ if Chaosium produces a new Gloranthan RPG. It's a pity really. A lot of us spent a lot of time playtesting RuneQuest. Adventures in Glorantha and posting suggestions to the playtest list only to have Greg Stafford reject the preliminary draft. We ended up waiting for some sign that the problems would be resolved but got little assurance that they could be corrected.

I suspect that the new Glorantha RPG will be a lot lower in magic and it will be harder to get healing. Apparently Stafford has said that healing in his vision of Glorantha is about one-tenth as common as it is in RQ. Unfortunately the abundance of magic is one of the things I *like* about RQ and my recent experience with *Pendragon* would indicate that without decent healing player characters in the new game would have very short lives. I'm concerned that we'll end up with really weak characters who are the cannon fodder of the

Hero Wars rather than characters that are on the path to Heroism themselves.

LOOKING BACKWARD

I went on and on last issue about the season opener for DS9, didn't I? Well, it appears that the theme for this season so far is Identity. So far we've had Odo finding out who his people really are, Dax finding out about a life she never knew she had, Kira being told that she was really a Cardassian and then asserting the truth, and now we find out that the Jem'Hadar are a genetically created race of warriors that grow to adulthood in a matter of days. Of course I'd asserted the latter a while back as it seemed rather obvious; the Jem'Hadar are too vicious to be a normal race. Obviousness is a problem this season. I knew what was going on in the episode with Kira being told she was a Cardassian very early on. They've not been all that surprising this season.

COMMENTS ON IR#7

* Editorial Page Peter Maranci in his editor manifestation

On issue size: I have to wonder if a bimonthly schedule might be better. After all, most of the contributor are bimonthly already.

On the Party: Well, it was a nice idea. I'd like to see an IR get-together of some kind some day. Of course I'd like to see a big mass viewing of various of the mass of MST3K tapes lying about; I think I'm the only one of us to have seen the whole of *Robot Holocaust*, one of the best first CC season shows.

* The Log That Flies #7 Peter Maranci in his zine manifestation

On RPG as Art: I'm skittish about elevating RPG to Art status. Bottom line, it's gaming. In a sense it is a form of participatory performance art, I suppose. But if we start taking it too seriously it ceases to be fun and becomes a task, a ritual, an attempt at great accomplishments, but not a game anymore.

On the Ice Ruins: That sure seems familiar...

On "In The Box": Good story! I've seen similar sorts; the most famous would be "Comes a soldier; later, another" by Robert Silverberg in which historical figures are recreated in computer simulations and interact with people and other simulations.

Designing a Fantasy Role-playing World Rich Staats

Hmmm, this sort of illustrates the virtues of pre-made game worlds. :) Seriously, you bring up stuff that should be taken into consideration when people design worlds. I suspect that a lot of the time people end up with rather inconsistent worlds.

* Refugee # -(some sort of Greek letter)

On the story: It's very good. Maybe it could be published as a serial or a series of related stories in one of the magazines?

* Session Notes #21 Doug Jorenby

On horror: I suspect that a lot of Vampire: the Masquerade campaigns end up degenerating into a sort of super-power game. How do you keep an atmosphere of horror if the player characters are the monsters? To an extent, they have to be scared of themselves. Hard to do.

* Who is John Galt? #7 Curtis Taylor

On RuneQuest news: I just might pick up a copy of Lords of Terror; Cults of Terror was one of the more interesting things I've seen for RQ2.

On Stafford and the "Lunar Book": I've read King of Sartar and to be honest I'd rather that he had been writing world books for RQ; KoS is only of value as background for Glorantha gamers. But I haven't seen the "Lunar Book" stuff, to be sure.

On Dune: I've played **Dune**; our illustrious editor and and Scott Ferrier both have copies and one of them has *Spice Harvest* and the other expansion. Good and different type of game. I think they're out of print.

* Strange Sands Gilbert Pili

On horror: Yup, horror doesn't have to involve the supernatural or monsters or such things. But I'd

have to say that those do help to put a little distance between the horrors of a story and real life. After all, we know that there's evil psychos out there to real commit horrors on us but most of us know that there aren't vampires and other monsters out there (there aren't, are there?). Real life terror isn't much fun.

* Aye Matey Vol. I Issue VI Scott Ferrier

On PC games: Someday I'll get that motherboard working so that I can play some of that stuff. :)

On the "The Master" deck and tourneys: Well, I've determined from my experience in the "sealed deck" tournament that it is certainly possible to beat a superior deck with an inferior deck given a little luck and some skill in game play. I still lost ultimately, but I beat better decks with my wimpy tri-color deck.

NEXT MONTH

In a fit of insanity, I bought the MtG novel Arena. My main reason was to get the two unique cards that can only be obtained by purchasing the novel and sending in the coupon and a receipt to the HarperPrism people. But I should have the book read by next month and I'll try and review it. Will it confirm the notion that all game fiction stinks?

Also other reviews, and whatever other stuff I come up with. :)

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Tales of Ralios

Synopsis: Konall, Minara, Una, Jornast, Harmast, and Aidin were initiated into the Belovaking clan. They crossed to the other side and with the aid of the Flint Slinger Left-Stone Shouter, passed many trials, so many that the priest Halvar Stormeye said that Orlanth had chosen them for a great fate. Thethane, Ekel Field-Destroyer, took them on their first cattle raid, into Naskorion.

Thethane's daughters attracted several suitors. Minara turned hers down. Una asked Nath Brawl to fetch her a horse, then set out to visit another suitor. They travelled through Kilwin, and were attacked by Galanini because they were riding horses. Una turned down Radgan the Whistler because he appeased the Galanini. While guesting with a farmer, they beat off a trollkin horde, but not before Harmast had his ear chewed off. Konall visited Fola Giver and Tailte, and decided to marry Fola. Nath Brawl returned with a Galanini pony and its rider's head, and Una married him.

Year 19 of Ekel Field-Destroyer

When he discovered that Una was pregnant, Nath Brawl had a divination cast. He was upset when the seer's answer was, "Life begins at night." However, Ekel Field-Destroyer also had a divination cast for his grandchild, and got, "Dark rage's sister sings, a child is born. The waters cover all." The consensus was that the prophecies mentioned Xiola Umbar, the troll goddess of healing. The obvious place to find her was in the troll lands in eastern Corolaland, but Methe the Traveller said that the Mokevogi clan's women worshipped Xiola Umbar to ease their childbirth. They decided to head east; they would at least go as far as the Ajim tribe, and possibly on to Corolaland. They took some trade goods that trolls might want, and Nath figured they could go on a cattle raid just before they met the trolls.

Jornast wanted to talk to the Kolating shaman at the Orlanth complex in Kilwin, so they headed for the city. They decided to camp outside, though they had trouble finding a spot, and ended up giving gifts to a local farmer.

Una was examined at the Chalana Arroy temple. They predicted she'd have a girl, and recommended against Xiola Umbar as being coarse and violent.

Korun visited the Lawspeaking Lodge, and learned a little about trolls from Engorn the Head-Full, such as a drum beat to beware of.

Una spotted a man wearing a tall, red and white striped, cylindrical hat, being followed by a man dressed similarly but with a beret. The latter said he worked for Eleskorth of Noloswal, on the coast, and that his master, a busy man, knew about trolls. He agreed to receive them at the Seventeen-Point Moose Inn that evening after Una promised that Konall would play his bagpipes.

Una also talked to a newtling, who didn't much like trolls but had traded fish with one for some gems. The newtling said that Kilwin was named after the newtling hero who built it, and that the blue-green dome currently underwater was their temple to Doskior and Pastoma, and would be exposed in Fire Season when the river was lower.

At the inn, Eleskorth's lackey didn't extend any hospitality. Nath entered a drinking contest and lost, possibly due to trickery. When the lackey was again rude, pointedly refusing to offer food or an apology, they decided not to see Eleskorth after all — either he knew nothing of hospitality, or didn't respect them, and in either case, they wanted nothing of him. They returned to their camp in the dark with some difficulty.

After several days, Jornast learned a Multimissile spell, and they continued east. They stayed again with Denall Talvingi, who hadn't had any trouble with trollkin since they'd last visited.

As I described in my last issue, I'm running a Gloranthan campaign set in East Ralios.

Last issue marriage, this issue childbirth.

Una had been attempting not to become pregnant, but I assume that pre-industrial birth control isn't as reliable, and still gave her a chance on the annual childbirth roll.

Gotta love them obscure divinations.

Xiola Umbar is the sister of Zorak Zoran, troll god of hate and war. Gloranthan trolls are associated with Darkness, and are in fact nocturnal.

Methe the Traveller sits on the Belovaking clan ring as the Issaries (Talking God) representative.

I'm allowing every character to learn one spell not normally available from the pantheon — one way around the fact that no Orlanth worshipper can learn Multimissile (despite Odayla being in the pantheon — Odayla isn't an associated deity). The Kolating shamans who sometimes hang out at the Great Temple in Kilwin are convenient for this.

They wanted to camp outside Kilwin because, being good Orlanthi and used to hospitality, they were uncomfortable at the idea of paying for it at an inn.



See last issue for details of their last stay with Denall of the Talvingi clan.

As they entered Ajim lands, they were met by two chariots and five men on foot who asked, "Are you friends or foes of the Kolorain clan?" Although Korun tried to stay neutral, eventually insults were exchanged, and they attacked. Several of the Olkoring warriors threw javelins great distances. One knocked Harmast off his horse, but he got up and continued the charge on foot. Jornast used Multimissile on a javelin and killed a horse, then Befuddled the driver of the other chariot. Una and Konall took out its warrior, and Konall chased after the driver, who managed to knock him off his horse.

Nath fought from the chariot yoke until he had taken several wounds. Finally, only one of the Olkoring warriors was still standing. Korun asked him to surrender. He hesitated, then agreed. Korun then took off on his charger, caught up to the charioteer, and dispelled the Befuddle spell on him. He then persuaded him to join his kinsmen in surrender.

They took the arms and armor, as well as the three surviving horses, one chariot, and the wheels from the other one.

The Olkoring explained their feud with the Kolorain, who were also of the Ajim tribe, and denied that any Ajimi worshipped a troll god.

They ran across several standing stones arranged in a straight line, each covered with strange runes.

They arrived at the Mokevogi tula, and explained their mission to the thane, Dorn Hundred Hogs. He gave Una a cloak, and had them escorted to the Soothing Touch Grove. On the way, their guide pointed out Narent's Oak, sacred to Narent Mudman who blessed their pigs, and told about Bowbreaker, another local spirit.

The circle of trees contained a crudely carved but obviously female statue. Dailenn Curly Hair was the grove's tender. She denied any connection between the local spirit Soothing Touch and the troll goddess Xiola Umbar, although trolls sometimes visited the grove. She was unwilling to let outsiders participate in a Mokevogi ritual — it was bad enough that an outsider, Madur Great Valor of the Jaskori clan, had just last Storm Season stolen the necklace which had hung on the statue.

At the feast that night, they learned that Madur Great Valor was a Storm Lord, and was from the Narit tribe, so it was difficult to obtain justice. He'd stolen the necklace because of a geas. The Mokevogi had twice sent warriors to get the necklace back, and failed.

Intamorl the Noble's sister Kimne (Konall's aunt) had married into the Mokevogi clan. Her granddaughter Ingkar introduced herself, and wanted to hear all about her distant kin. She offered to intercede with Dailenn Curly Hair, who eventually agreed to perform the childbirth ritual if they returned Soothing Touch's necklace. Jornast swore an oath to do so. Meanwhile, Konall hobnobbed with Akavran the Piper of the Lelvani clan, who was a guest at the stead.

The Ozobo clan demanded a toll of one cow to cross their lands. Harmast shamed them by pointing out how greedy this was, and they agreed to let the group pass. Konall then offered a contest. Nath won a chariot race, Korun defeated his opponent in a memory game, and Jornast won a javelin toss.

They were met by warriors in finely decorated chariots, who escorted them to Madur Great Valor's stead. Madur was busy giving craisech instruction and other duties of a Rune Lord.

At the feast that night. Una asked about the various items on the trophy wall. Madur was glad to explain about the leather hat that had once housed a sorcerer's familiar, the Telmori shaman's drum

The Olkoring clan heroquest ability lets them throw javelins at long range.

Every clan worships several local spirits. It certainly appears that the Mokevogi worship Xiola Umbar as one of theirs, though they deny this (perhaps before Arkat betrayed the Orlanthi by becoming a troll they would have agreed?).

The Mokevogi clan is part of the Ajim tribe; the Jaskori clan is part of the Narit tribe. In a dispute, they'd have to get justice from the King of Delela, which is impractical in most cases.

I haven't really decided whether or not Madur Great Valor was geased to steal the necklace; in fact his Honest trait isn't that high, and he might have been lying. It's true that he had to steal *something* from a darkness goddess [probably a troll priestess would serve], but not likely someone placed a specific geas on him to go bother the Mokevogi spirit.

I tried to show how a Rune Lord would have to spend his 90% time requirement.

Telmori are the "werewolf people," worshippers of the wolf totem cursed to become wolves once a week, at full moon.

which still growled every Wildday, and the necklace he'd stolen from a darkness goddess so that he could join the Sandals of Darkness sub-cult.

They slept in the great hall, but decided not to steal the unguarded necklace while they were guests.

The next morning, Madur drove off on more cult business, and they debated their options. Many people in Madur's stead seemed to have the sniffles — Madur himself had a persistent cough. Although Harmast and Una tried to play it up, everybody seemed to think it was just an unusually bad case of seasonal colds, though they had lasted quite a while. Jornast and Nath were both willing to fight Madur, but everyone finally decided to try another approach first.

When Madur Great Valor returned, Harmast eloquently explained why they needed the necklace. Madur gave it to them.

They returned to the Mokevogi, and were feasted. Dailern Curly Hair purified the necklace, then performed the Childbirth Ritual, which transferred the pains of childbirth to the father. Una and Nath were painted identically, covered with a blanket, and took each other's role in the ceremony.

On their way back, Jornast asked again to marry Aibell of the Red Hair, but her father put him off again. Una talked privately to Aibell, suggesting she try to influence her father, and impose a quest.

Since Madur Great Valor merely took a necklace from a sacred grove, instead of raiding a Kiger Litor temple, does he really deserve his nickname?

This scenario seemed perfect for Orlanthi, since the solutions were all cultural: fight Madur, steal the necklace, or rely on the generosity of someone sworn to Orlanth.

I'm using the *Pendragon* standard of making a Courtesy roll if you want a good marriage.

Comments on #5

Andrew Howes If you're not already familiar with the game *Pendragon*, you should check it out. It's the only game I know of that attempts to provide rules for things like Sir Bors's choice between his brother and the maiden. Why do we need rules for that sort of thing, when it ought to be roleplaying? Just as the combat rules settle the "Bang! I got you!" "No you didn't!" of childhood games, the personality rules solve the problem of everyone doing the obvious right thing. ("Of course I reject Guinevere, I'm looking for the Grail!")

Douglas Jorenby In Glorantha many fans object to the copying of historical cultures. I understand their point — if we wanted to play Celts, why not just play *Pendragon's Pagan Shore* supplement? — but it's also a really convenient shorthand. ✕ re ct Pili: I suppose you're referring to *Pendragon* as having a "rigid set of 'traits' or 'personality characteristics'" and trying to force players to adhere to them? That's an obvious but incorrect way to use the rules. I do ask for personality tests on occasion, but just as often I hand out a personality check (which means the trait can go up) when someone behaves a particular way. The personality system is as much a way to measure as it is to guide behavior.

Dale Meier It's nice to hear from a Christian gamer — too often one hears of the misinformed fanatics. ✕ I liked the bit on slicers — in my Twelve Worlds campaign, based on *Star Wars* rules, I moved Computers to Perception. (The original rules has Computer Programming/Repair as a Technical skill, but not only are those unrelated tasks, I can't imagine telling a computer what to do will remain technical in the far future.) I tried to tell players that the Computer skill wasn't really netrunning, but they tried to use it that way anyway. You could get a Computer Link implant, which simply lets you access the local Net without needing to carry a computer. ✕ I must have missed the Canadian bill you refer to. ✕ So have you seen Chaosium's *Nephilim*, which bills itself as a game of the occult? ✕ Darkness and depravity definitely have their place in gaming — as something to fight against. You struggle against the hypercorporations in a cyberpunk game to do more than just a corporate reorganization. In *Star Wars*, the Empire is a backdrop to heroism — it wouldn't be the same if the Rebel Alliance were merely disgruntled office-seekers.

George Phillis Nice story, more engaging than the superhero kids.

Gilbert Pili Show, don't tell, is what I'm trying to do in my *Ralios* game by starting out characters as young adults. I'm afraid I do have handouts, but I try to keep them short. A player-specific one appears below. ✕ Ah, I knew your name sounded familiar. ✕ Duct tape was one of the more popular items in my cyberpunk campaign. ✕ Yeah, while it would probably be more fun to be a Lunar (it's more secure and with a higher standard of living), I think the freedom-loving Orlanthi are the most fun Gloranthan culture to play.

Curtis Taylor What do I use to determine adulthood in my *Ralios* campaign? No way am I getting into that argument! [There was an extended and boring discussion on the RuneQuest Daily Digest about this.] In my introductory scenario, initiation as an adult and initiation as a member of an Orlanthi religion happened at essentially the same time. Presumably, if there could be an adult who wasn't a religious initiate, they'd be able to use the clan's heroic ability. ✕ The initiation heroquest was based on a scenario I got from Jonas

Schiött and his friends in Sweden. I think it worked really well as a way to teach the culture — even though the players don't always behave that way, they all know the Orlanthi principle of act first, fix your mistakes second.

Comments on #6

David Hoberman I agree with you that games should mix heroism and grit. My interpretation of cyberpunk is that it's about being heroic despite the bleak surroundings; in most of Gibson's writings, bad things happen to those who make bad moral choices.

Comments on #7

George Phillis Yes, my *Ralios* game is set in Glorantha, and I use *Pendragon* rules (with magic rules based on RQ). As to what the players get out of it, that's a good question. Fun, I hope. If nothing else, it illustrates a different style of game, the "dynastic." (I always try to run a game I'd like to play in.) I'm not sure what I get out of the games I play in, other than entertainment. What do you get out of a game? As a GM, I have an outlet for my creative urges, and I can entertain others.

Gilbert Pili re ct me: Most of my players are long-time RQ players; most played non-Gloranthan until recently. Una's player has never played RQ, and few other games.✕ The maps I scanned in, played with using *PhotoShop* and *ColorIt*, and then added text labels in *ClarisWorks*.

Curtis Taylor I admit I haven't played it, but I always thought *Macho Women with Guns* was Greg Porter's best game design (the others I've seen were too complicated to play).

Player Handout for Una

- Your father Ekel Field-Destroyer was elected thane in large part because his brother Ingolf's neck wound made him ineligible. Egan Big-Blade was his main competition, and everyone was surprised when Ekel made Egan one of his housecarls.
- Your mother is Lina, Ekel Field-Destroyer's second wife.
- You're a member of the Vinga subcult of Orlanth, which is for women adventurers. Members cut their hair short and wash it with lime, and can sacrifice POW for the rune spell Wind Run. Uathne is the Belovaking clan's Vinga acolyte.
- In one story, Ragnaglar [the Mad god] kidnaps Barntar [Plow god] while Orlanth is off on the Light-bringer's Quest. Neither Elmal [Orlanth's housecarl who was left behind to guard the stead] nor anyone else is available to rescue him, so they are ready to write Barntar off. Vinga, however, is upset with this and asks Elmal to let her go off and rescue him. She is given permission and gathers up a lot of snakes who form a cloak for her. She reaches Ragnaglar's camp, convinces him to let her in, and then dances for him. However, this is all a ruse to fling the snakes at him during the dance and make off with Barntar.
- The Belovaking have the heroic ability of Fireblood. You can make your blood boil and steam, healing up to your Honor in hit points. This will not eliminate a Major Wound, however. You must follow the geas, never extinguish a fire. You can use this ability once in the year following attendance at a Sacred Time reenactment of the heroquest which Kilti Cloudrider first performed to gain the ability for the clan.
- The Karbaring have the heroic ability of Battle Shout. This intimidates your opponents — all must make a Valorous roll or be at -2 skill. This is not cumulative, but if two Karbarings shout, opponents must make two rolls. You must follow the geas, never refuse a challenge in Damali (deer people) lands. You can use this ability once in the year following attendance at a Sacred Time reenactment of the heroquest which Narstav Antler-Helm first performed to gain the ability for the clan.
- Your husband is Nath Brawl, son of Kerval Very Tall, thane of the Karbaring clan of Keanos. He's an initiate of Urox, accomplished with craisech, surprisingly well-spoken, vain, and known for taking daring chances in battle.
- Family Trait: Natural speaker and storyteller; Interests: Brawling, Legends
- Age: 25, SIZ 18. Status: 800 (+ Una's) One older sister (married), 5 younger sisters
- Clans in thinly-populated Keanos subsist only by herding and hunting; they grow no wheat at all. Unlike Delela, the clans do not form into tribes. There is, however, a king who represents all the clans, Valk the Hand. There are more hsunchen peoples in Keanos than Delela — Nath is worried that you ride your horse instead of yoking it to a chariot.
- Keanish is in the same language family as Delelan, and you can speak it at 2/3 your skill in Delelan.

I'm not a poet,
so I can't write a haiku
for Interregnum.

Human Nature : Angel, Beast, or Oxymoron?

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Some time back, Peter Maranci proposed as the month's topic "Human Nature". His own response a month later invoked "Good and Evil". To me, both the nature of man and the nature of Good and Evil are Great Questions. The best minds of all the centuries have been trying to answer them. The efforts of even the most veteran GM are not going to significantly impact the Halls of Academia.

Still, any decent GM must have some sort of answer to these questions. I for one dislike the "black and white" school of gaming, where man is portrayed as a good guy or a bad guy. I enjoy more the "shades of grey" school, where it is not always immediately clear the proper thing to do. The grey approach is both more realistic, and presents the players with more interesting choices.

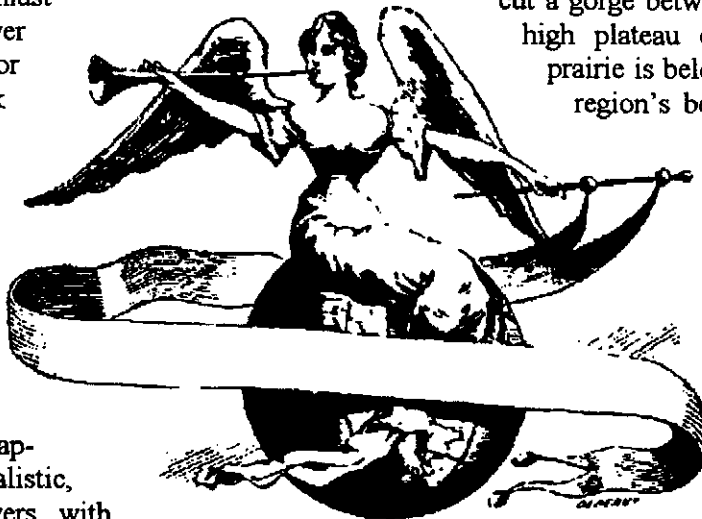
Yet, while it is easy to build black and white characters, how does one build grey people? I'm going to develop some other traits of mankind. Man is a creature of instincts. Man is a creature of culture (or habit). Man is also capable of rationalizing his actions, so that however black his actions may appear on the surface, many individuals can portray themselves as white in the minds. Finally, after reviewing these other dimensions of human behavior, we can

return to the original criteria of Good and Evil to see what is left, if anything.

WILD WEST

As an illustration of a human conflict that might be typical of an FRP scenario, I'm going to sketch out a valley of the 1800s North American Wild West.

The valley features a fast flowing stream which cut a gorge between two mountain chains. A high plateau opens above it. The open prairie is below. The stream is one of the region's best sources of water. Living in the region are a half dozen characters, each of which might become a player character in a competitive scenario where not all of the characters win. More likely, one of the below individuals is leader of the PC group, and the rest become NPC opposition.



The Native American Chief has a treaty which says the valley is his as long as the grass grows and the sun shines. He has doubts about the treaty's worth. In past years he has made an uneasy peace with the cattle people, but now more white people are coming.

The cattle rancher sees the valley as open range, and as such it is open to him and to all. He opened this land, and has been the Big Man here, and is used to getting his way. As his ranch hands are

numerous and loyal, few have challenged him.

The cavalry captain is here to keep the peace, and to follow orders from Washington. On the other hand, money talks. It can certainly change the orders, and might even change how they are interpreted.

The Sheriff of the local town is also here to keep the peace, but at another level. He owns the saloon, and gets his cut from sales of alcohol, from gambling, and from prostitution. He's kind of ruthless, but is good at keeping 'the law' as he would like to see it. This mostly means he'll run off anyone who wants to run a competing scam. He's got an understanding with the cavalry captain, but the cattle rancher and his ruffians don't like him very much.

The young German immigrant farmer has a deed to some land just outside the valley, astride a ford used by most everyone. He comes with barbed wire. He's got the law on his side, a fair young wife, and numerous farmer friends whose lands are not quite in such a strategic position. The other farmers have also been having troubles with the cattle men, the Indians, and that ungodly sheriff.

The railroad robber baron has sent an agent to quietly do whatever it takes to get a road driven through the valley to the high plateau. If he succeeds, most everyone (white) in the region will become wealthier. However, this wealth will not be evenly distributed...

THE PACK HUNTER

When a student of animals describes a beast's behavior, it is natural and accepted that he would speak of instincts and drives. Some modern schools which would accent man's ability to reason and minimize the role of preprogrammed directives dislike attributing to men preprogrammed behaviors. The (expletive deleted) with them.

I'm going to talk of lions, wolves and men as sharing some basic drives. I'll review a drive. I'll show how the presence of that drive in moderation is healthy for the possessor and his dependents. In most

cases, it can be shown that the lack of such a drive is not healthy, nor is an excess of that drive. When done, we'll have a partial list of basic drives which might partially define 'human nature'. At any time we can review our list of Wild West antagonists, and see that they share in various degrees all these drives.

This section defines how men are alike. In the next section we will examine cultures, and how the various Wild West antagonists twist the common drives to adapt to varying conditions.

Let's start with an easy drive. All lions, wolves, and men get hungry. Appetites result in eating, which is a healthy behavior. One with a too powerful hunger might over eat, and get fat, which is not so healthy. One with a weak hunger drive might not eat enough, which is not healthy either. All our antagonists get hungry. On the surface, hunger has nothing to do with the Wild West conflict, but we shall see about that later. One who responds to his hunger drive by eating in moderation might be a 'Good' man. One who stuffs his face in excess, perhaps ignoring the needs of others, might be drifting towards 'Evil'.

After hunger, let's move on to sex. There is a strong tendency among lions, wolves, men and other beasts for males and females to get together and produce young. At the center of normal acceptable behavior, you get affection, protection, nurturing and growth out of family behavior. At the abnormal extremes one might see rape, domestic violence, and dysfunctional families. It's getting easier to apply words like Good and Evil now, isn't it? Again, at first look, the above Wild West scenario has nothing at all to do with sex and family drives, any more than the hunger



drive. Let's take a second look. What happens if the families of the Indian chief, farmer, cattlemen, or most anyone else has their supply of food threatened? As we shall see, the adults will do as necessary to feed the young.

On to the peer bond. While men (unlike wolves or lions) might hunt alone, they do not act and stand alone. Men of the same gender and age groups tend to gang together. Each Wild West antagonist in our example is the leader of a group of men that shares a common life style. Each member of each group might want to be a leader someday. There is a competition for status among each group. There are various traditions and prizes which determine who will lead should a crisis arrive. In a well working group, this competition for leadership might result in a more effective response to any external threat. Such behavior might be Good. Of course, bickering or excessive desire for status or leadership could divide the group or weaken it. Again, we drift towards Evil. Finally, if a potential member of the group is not inclined follow the group, it is weakened. Thus, the peer bond can be too weak.

Finally, there is the territorial instinct. For wolf or lion, each pack or pride must have enough land with enough game to feed the family. If intruders come, they are sensed, rejected, and driven off. It is easy to see the conflict for our western valley as an echo of an animal skirmish for territory. For men though, just land is not always sufficient. In a complex society, there are many resources that might be necessary for the members of the peer bond and their families to continue it's lifestyle. Would the cavalry fight to protect an valued ore found in the hills? How much will the railroad push for the smoothest possible grade on their projected route?

How can a man defending the land and resources necessary to feed his family and continue his way of life not be seen as Good? How can the outsider coming in to seize the homeland's resources not be seen as Evil?

What then is the Good man? He loves and protects his family. He protects the resources necessary that his family might thrive. He is a member of a group which uses similar resources, and is willing to

defend them as necessary. What is an Evil man? He is a Good man, only more so.

A Creature of Habit

In theory, man is a creature of reason. Given a problem, he can reach an objective and logical solution. I won't deny the existence of reason or logic. In practice though, logic and reason are not overly relevant to the behavior of realistic human NPCs. As a crude model of how to set NPC behavior, I'd suggest that logic and reason should only be applied after the prejudices of the NPCs culture have gotten him into so much trouble that his livelihood and income is threatened. Even then, an INT and EGO check might be required.

Habit is the most important aspect of culture. What problems has a character encountered in his past, his father's past, and his grandfather's? What solutions were applied to these problems? The truly human NPC should solve today's problems using yesterday's solutions.

The cavalry commander is real good at catching Confederate supply trains, and hitting infantry in the flank. Has he ever fought Indians? Courage is the major status trait among the Indian warriors. Whatever solution they might have to their problems, it must involve the youngsters showing their worth. Talking tough with a few dozen cowhands with rifles at his back has always worked for the cattle rancher. What will he do next time someone tries to cross him? Many of the German farmers emigrated after the failed revolutions of 1848. Their ideas of Liberty, Law, Tyranny and Discipline are shaped by their failures in the Old World, as well as the promises made in the New World's Constitution.

The NPC must have a history. What problems did he face in his youth? How did he solve them? What problems did his parents have? How did they solve them? More important still, what are the abstractions made from these past problems? The Revolution and Civil War were fought for 'Freedom' and 'Liberty'. What do these mean to a young black cavalry conscript? Will these concepts at all effect what orders his captain will give him? If the robber baron and the sheriff have both heard of Darwin's "survival

of the fittest", will their professions cause them to interpret the concept any differently?

Habit. Culture. The PCs are of course visitors from another realm. Their players are aloof from involvement, and full of 20th century values. It is all too common that a PC will use reason, find a clean and ethical solution, be a hero, and ride off into the sunset.

Does this make the PCs Good? In the pack hunter section, I used 'Good' to indicate an individual who exercised his instincts in moderation, and in such a way to benefit his family and peers. A reasonable, intelligent and habit free PC who applies his clean and ethical solution might also be labeled 'Good', even if the PC violates both human instincts and his culture of origin in solving the conflict. On the other hand, would such a PC really be acting in character in applying 20th century values and solutions to a 19th century game?

In playing an interesting and realistic NPC, reason and logic should be shunned. The Indian chief is not defending his territory so he can feed his family. Such a consideration is of secondary importance. First, he is defending his way of life. Your cattle drive is blocked by barbed wire. Your newly planted wheat is being trampled by cattle. Your newest troopers do not understand how important it is to do things By the Book. Your deputy was shot by a drunken cattleman.

What role has reason in any of this? Reason creates abstract ideas, some of which men are willing to die for. Money. Courage. Free grazing. Holy ground. The Law. The Flag. Looking at any given culture's past, one can see how such concepts can help a culture grow and thrive. This is Good. One can also see how these concepts mix explosively with the status drive of the peer bond, the territorial drive, and the instinctive readiness to see a rival peer group as The Enemy. This can result in Evil.

If men contested rationally for resources, compromise would be easy, there would be few conflicts, and the scenario would be boring. Route the train through the valley, but away from the tribe's village and the holy areas. Fence crop areas only, but leave

open paths for cattle drives. If the other guy cheats at poker, protest politely.

The cavalry commander lost an arm at Gettysburg, a son at Petersburg, and is not going to lose any more of these goddamned niggers than he absolutely has to. He was also with Burnside's brigade when 'Taps' was first played. Hearing it brings back memories.

God created Man. Mr. Colt made them equal.

THE RATIONALIZING BEAST

The Robber Baron is an aloof and distant scum. Perhaps after he has bribed the U.S. Congress and the territorial governor into making his interests Law, he becomes more real. When his men start driving tracks down his so called right of way, he will be a presence. Perhaps then he'll speak of inevitable progress, rub his fat stomach, and laugh derisively at the others. Until then, let's leave him alone. Pick any of the others.

The shooting has started. A respected member of your peer group is dead. Your surviving peers are standing with guns at ready listening. It is time to make a speech. (These are the 1800s. They are really big on speeches.) Your way of life is threatened. Your means of feeding your family is not secure. Is there any doubt at all that you can convince your peers that you are the Good Guys wearing White Hats? If you declined, would not someone else step forward to make as good a speech? What values will you invoke? What past battles will you mention, to steal a little glory? And is there any doubt at all that the opposing group deserves to burn in Hellfire Everlasting?

Of course, any good GM has to be ready to drop one NPC, and pick up the mind set and persona of another. Yep, across the valley another leader is making another speech. Repeat the above exercise again, and again, and again...

There are no Evil Men in this valley tonight. There are only Good Men, only More So.

Good and Evil, Revisited

Smug, aren't you, sitting there with your 20th Century values and mind set. You can role play any of those Wild West people, then smile at their quaint historical irrelevancy. Of course all the nasty things that happened back then couldn't happen now. We live in an age of reason and intelligence.

Genera switch. Modern Cops. You became an inner city paramedic to help people and make a difference, but now there are wounded people lying everywhere, and you would have some tough decisions to make if you could just stop crying... Persona swap. Your camera crew has wonderful footage, blood everywhere, and are you going to scoop the other channels tonight! Persona swap. You are an innocent bystander, you just live across the hall, but the Pigs are cuffing and beating every black male in the building... Persona swap. Your partner is dead, and tonight you are not in any mood to read anyone their Miranda rights... Persona swap. Yes you must comfort the dying, and perform rites for the dead, but if someone doesn't get a lid on the living, your whole parish might burn...

Racism. Sexism within the force. Prostitution and other 'victimless' crimes. Gangs. Drugs. Arson. The Mafia. Metal detectors in elementary schools. Need I go on?

The NPC still must only respond to crisis in terms of how he or she has perceived previous crisis. They should only abandon old concepts and values after a major emotional crises shows the tried and true ways have crashed and burned. The NPC still has loyalties to peer and family. He still is too ready to see an opposing peer group as the enemy. He can still justify his actions if he is inclined to do so.

But if the 1800s were a Black and White century, welcome to the Age of Grey. Some of those people who love and defend their family and friends, would murder a stranger for pocket change. A 'good' cop is one who does what he can while looking out for number one. Very few would understand why in the 19th Century people capitalized words like Law, Justice, Liberty and Equality. For sure, in the 20th Century, the practice of capitalizing virtues is long

dead. Have the virtues died too?

Not in fantasy role playing games at least. I'm a shades of grey player. But still, as a GM, I believe my players must believe they are doing the right thing. Most of my scenarios will involve the possibility of violence to liven things up. I prefer Hero Systems as a not too deadly combat system, where players don't have death guilt to worry about all that often. People get knocked silly before they die, mostly. So after the dust settles, the PCs can feel smug about having done the 'right' thing, and have defeated some scum who deserved to get defeated.

But still, the defeated NPCs are alive under the skin, or they should be. They have a past. Their response to the environment (or the PCs) must reflect that past. That past also gives them values, which are just abstractions of previous problems solved. If you are (fill_in_the_blank), everything else will take care of itself. Chose one value to live by, and a few back ups: Brave/ diligent/ clever/ loyal/ polite/ educated/ rich/ patriotic/ beautiful.

What then of Good and Evil? Do they exist, other than to make players feel good about beating up NPCs? Is that particular Great Question now



irrelevant? Should I too stop capitalizing virtues?

I don't think so. Good and Evil are still an ancient part of our culture. In the section on instinct, I could apply Good to one who constructively applied ancient drives to the modern environment. Evil was where a drive became too strong or weak, resulting in disharmony and no benefit to the individual, his family, or his peers.

In the section on cultures, a Good man might be one who knows how his father lived, how his father approached problems, and defends and continues The Way. An Evil man threatens another's way of life, and might perhaps force Change.

In the section on Man's ability to rationalize his actions, I proposed that most men can defend their lives and actions as Good, and can project those who oppose them as Evil.

Naturally, having developed these conflicting interpretations of 'Good', I can't leave them alone. I am compelled to confuse things by mashing them together to form some useful whole. Can one resolve the Great Question of Human Nature without solving Good and Evil too?

The instincts evolved. They are still evolving, though very slowly. Gene pools cannot adopt anywhere near as fast as cultures. Cultures evolve too. What works for one people, at one place, at one time, might easily fall apart a generation or two down the road.

If both instinct and culture change to adapt to new situations, can change be viewed as Evil? From within a culture, especially for the old, any force for change might be easily mistaken for Evil. That's just wrong. In these times, with technology inducing rapid changes, flexibility has got to be a virtue, and rigidity a high risk low probability of reward proposition.

There was another element I mentioned briefly, then discarded. What was it? Ah, yes. Intelligence and reason. Man supposedly has the ability to look at problems, without emotion, without prejudice, and without clinging to old and perhaps dated perspec-

tives. Love not just the family and your peer bonded friends. Love everybody equally. Defend not just your own resources. Defend the Earth. Respect all cultures as the equal of your own. Grow flowers. Slash the defense budget. Ignore the impulse to scream at the fundamentalist Christian trying to give the moral choices of his obscure cult the backing of Law.

Dream on.

Finally, I must apologise that my example was not Politically Correct. The Wild West was a time of sexism unbridled. My examples thus got male oriented, and ignored the minor matter of the Conflict between the Sexes. I can only claim that that's another Great Question. My limit is two Great Questions per article. Besides, no Woman would give up her advantage by explaining Her Nature, and if a Man correctly stated Women's Nature, She would Change. (Naturally.)

Maybe next time. Meanwhile, consider a so called Hunter Gatherer culture where the males are hunters and defenders of territory, and the females are gatherers and caretakers for the young. Specialize the instincts by gender for these different roles. Drop the distant descendants of these hunter-gatherers into a high tech environment where many of both sets of instincts are obsolete. Mix well. Dive for cover.

Maybe next time...

